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## **Resisting Empire in the Dutch Metropole: Anticolonial activists and initiatives in the interwar Netherlands (1927-1935)**

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# **Resisting Empire in the Dutch Metropole**

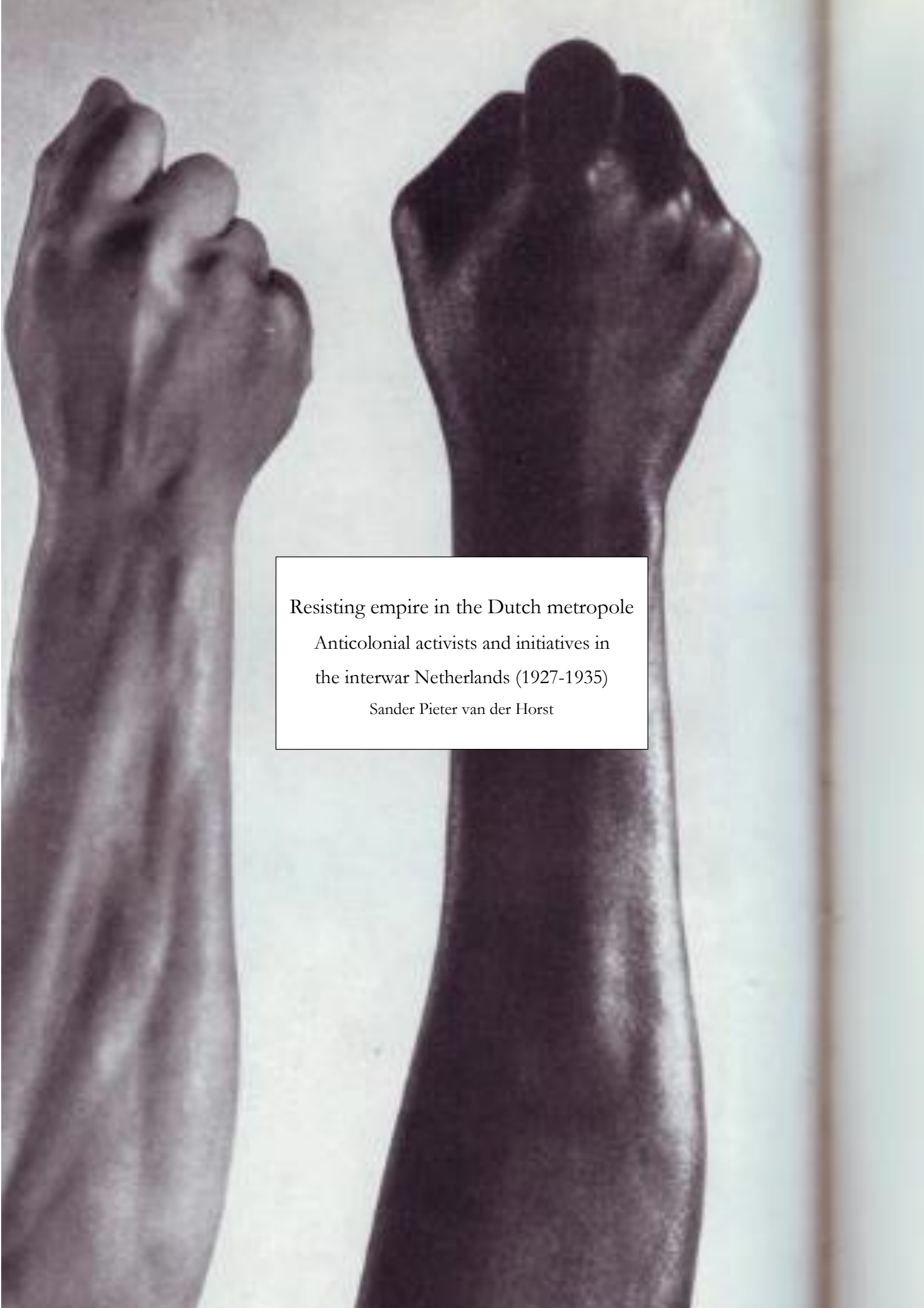
Anticolonial activists and initiatives in  
the interwar Netherlands (1927-1935)

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‘And suddenly I knew, I would listen to the complaints of my companions like my mother once listened to the sorrow of her boy. And maybe, I will be able to let them feel just a small part of all the hope and courage that lay within that one powerful word I learned abroad: organization.’

Anton de Kom on the effect of living in the Dutch metropole

Translated from: *Wij Slaven van Suriname* (1934), 209

‘You are asking me, what am I doing in Holland? I answer with a question in return: for what did you and thy come to Indonesia?’

Roestam Effendi standing on trial in Arnhem on June 29, 1933

Translated from: ‘Grote uitval van de justitie tegen de Indonesische massa’s’,

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It takes a village to write a thesis. It is therefore that I would like to dedicate a few sentences to the people part of that village. Obviously, I owe a debt of gratitude to Gert Oostindie for supervising this thesis and providing me with the necessary and insightful critiques of my text. I would also like to thank my parents who assisted me in word and deed. My thanks also go to Sebald, who was willing and able to think through crucial issues whenever that was necessary. Of course, my group of friends – and especially Oscar – needs to receive credits for the leisurely evenings I spend with them. They formed a welcome pause amidst long evenings of writing in a locked down world. I would like to express my sincere gratitude towards Sara Dehkordi who – unwittingly – has inspired me to walk this path. Without her seminar at the Freie Universität Berlin I would have never gained in an interest in anything colonial. Last but surely not least, I would like to thank Jessie without whose indefatigable support I would not have understood that the proof of every pudding is in its eating.

### A note on language and spelling

In this thesis, I use the words ‘Dutch East Indies’ and Indonesia interchangeably when referring to the colony that now constitutes the Republic of Indonesia. When referring to activists from this country I simply use the terms ‘Indonesian’ and ‘Indonesians’. In addition, I use the self-applied contemporary spelling of Indonesian names and organisations in the interwar period (e.g. ‘Perhimpoeanan’ instead of ‘Perhimpunan’). I use the terms ‘Dutch Caribbean’ and ‘Dutch West Indies’ interchangeably to designate the area that comprised the colony of Suriname and the (former) Netherlands Antilles, of which Curaçao is the most important island for this research.



## List of abbreviations

|           |                                                                                                                                      |
|-----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| AKTA      | <i>Anti-Koloniale Tentoonstellings Aktie</i><br>1932 campaign against the <i>Indische Tentoonstelling</i>                            |
| ARD       | <i>Algemeene Recherche Dienst</i><br>Secret service of the Dutch East Indies from 1927 to 1941                                       |
| CID       | <i>Centrale Inlichtingen Dienst</i><br>Dutch secret service agency from 1919 to 1940                                                 |
| Comintern | <i>Communist International</i> (also <i>Third International</i> )<br>International body of the Soviet Union from 1919 to 1943        |
| CPH       | <i>Communistische Partij Holland</i><br>Dutch communist party from 1919 to 1935, CPN from 1935                                       |
| DAI       | <i>De Anti-Imperialist</i><br>Journal of the LAI-NL from 1932, followed by “ <i>Liga</i> ”                                           |
| IAH       | <i>Internationale Arbeiterhilfe</i> (or <i>Worker’s International Relief</i> )<br>Organization offering communist support, 1922-1935 |
| LAI       | <i>League against Imperialism</i><br>Comintern-backed anti-imperialist organization, 1927-1937                                       |
| LAI-NL    | <i>Liga tegen Imperialisme, sectie Holland</i><br>Department of the LAI in the Netherlands founded in 1927                           |
| PI        | <i>Perhimpoenan Indonesia</i> (‘Indonesian Association’)<br>Indonesian anticolonial organization, called PI since 1925               |
| ReV       | <i>Recht en Vrijheid</i> (‘Justice and Freedom’)<br>Journal of the LAI-NL from 1927 to 1928                                          |
| SDAP      | <i>Sociaal-Democratische Arbeiderspartij</i><br>Dutch Labour Party from 1894 to 1946, PvdA from 1946                                 |
| SPTI      | <i>Sarekat Peranakan Tionghoa Indonesia</i><br>Chinese-Indonesian anticolonial organization since 1932                               |
| IT        | <i>Indische Tentoonstelling</i> (‘Indies Exhibition’)<br>Dutch imperial exhibition in The Hague in 1932                              |
| WCIW      | <i>World Congress against Imperialist War</i><br>Comintern-backed congress in Amsterdam in 1932                                      |

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## Introduction

### Resisting empire in the Dutch metropole

The 27<sup>th</sup> of August, 1932. A large and awfully hot hallway in Amsterdam. Red and green cloths hang from the ceiling, bearing the words: *Krieg dem Kriege! Hands off China! Guerre à la guerre!* Hundreds of tables, strewn with papers, stand in slightly askew rows towards a podium. Many sitting at the tables have rolled up their sleeves because of the heat.<sup>1</sup> The attendants are waiting for a speech to be held by the Indonesian Achmed Soebardjo. When he arrives, Dutch communists take position on both sides of the stage and shout: 'Free from Holland, Now, Now Now!'<sup>2</sup> The speech of Soebardjo is followed by a an appearance of the Indian nationalist Vallabhbhai Patel. Towards the end of Patel's speech, Ada Wright – an African American woman who has been traveling through the Netherlands together with the Surinamese activist Anton de Kom – enters the conference room. As Wright approaches Patel, she shakes his hand. Delegates 'spontaneously rise to their feet and massively give them a long-lasting ovation.'<sup>3</sup>

The scene described here took place during the *World Congress against Imperialist War* (WCIW) in the summer of 1932 in Amsterdam. It paints a picture of how anticolonial activists from different backgrounds and countries crossed paths in the Dutch capital. While almost all of them supported or stood sympathetic to communism, they charted their own courses of action and stood for different political agendas.

For the activists from the Netherlands and the Dutch colonies, the congress was part of a longer trajectory of activism in the metropole. From the 1920s onwards, students from the Dutch East Indies (current Indonesia) – who had travelled to the Dutch metropole for their studies – started to advocate for independence, most notably through the organization *Perhimpunan Indonesia* ('Indonesian Association', PI). In 1927, Dutch and Indonesian activists from the PI joined forces to form the Dutch branch of an international organization called the *League against Imperialism and for National Independence* (LAI). The PI and the Dutch branch of the LAI (LAI-NL) were initially conceived as organizations in which different political ideologies could coexist. In the late 1920, however, both were taken over by their communist members. Together with the Surinamese activist Anton de Kom and the Chinese-Indonesian organization *Sarekat Peranakan Tionghoa Indonesia* ('Chinese-Indonesian Peranakan Society',

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<sup>1</sup> 'Het anti-oorlogs congres', *Provinciale Geldersche en Nijmeegsche Courant*, August 29, 1932, 1.

<sup>2</sup> 'De samenstelling van het congres', *De Tribune*, August 31, 1932, 5.

<sup>3</sup> 'Het congres applaudisseert', *Het Volk*, August 29, 1932, 2.

SPTI) the PI and the LAI-NL formed a small activist group that opposed Dutch empire and increasingly operated in the communist circles of the Netherlands. These groups eventually appeared as delegates at the *World Congress against Imperialist War* in 1932. At the congress in Amsterdam, they met other activists who – although hailing from other countries and speaking different languages – stood for the same cause: resisting empire.

This thesis is interested in the anticolonial activism that took place in the interwar Netherlands. To conduct historical research on this subject, this thesis takes as its main object of analysis the political actions by the three groups that opposed empire in the Dutch metropole: activists from the Netherlands, from the Dutch colonies and from other parts of the global South, with an emphasis on the second group and on the organization LAI-NL. The main research question of this thesis can hence be formulated as follows: *in which ways did activists in the interwar Dutch metropole organize themselves to advance an anticolonial agenda?* Without claiming to exhaustively answer this general question, I break it down into three specific cases of activist organization, about which I ask a separate set of questions. These cases correspond with my third, fourth and fifth chapter. While I briefly discuss them here, I will delve deeper into the reasons for choosing these subjects in my first chapter.

The first case taken up in this thesis concerns the publications from the Dutch branch of the League against Imperialism. From 1927 until 1928 and again in 1932, the LAI-NL issued journals with which it aimed to convince the public in the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies of the necessity of resisting Dutch empire. In studying these publications, I keep the following questions in mind: who were the authors behind these journals and which topics did they prioritize over others? How did these publications relate to the changing political dynamic of the organization that issued them? And what impact did these publications have on Dutch society and beyond?

The second case of this thesis consists of the relation between the Surinamese activist Anton de Kom and the anticolonial initiatives in the Netherlands in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Effectively the only activist from Suriname to push for independence in the Netherlands for most of the interwar period, De Kom engaged with the PI, the LAI-NL and with a campaign called the *Anti-Koloniale Tentoonstellingen Aktie* ('Anticolonial Exhibition Campaign', AKTA). In this case, I choose to focus on De Kom's engagement with these initiatives by asking: how was De Kom, if at all, effected by these organizations? And to what extent did he manage to ask attention for Suriname in these activist circles?

In order to enlarge my scope and include anticolonial activists from the global South, the third and last case of this chapter turns to the WCIW itself. As pointed out in the first

paragraphs of this introduction, several groups came together at this event, including Indian, Chinese, Japanese and African-American delegates. At the same time, the WCIW formed the last international congress of the LAI and introduced an antiwar agenda to the anticolonial activists that attended. I look at this congress on both an institutional and individual level to ask: how significant was the WCIW for anticolonial activism, compared to the earlier ‘world congresses’ of the LAI? And how did anticolonial activists at the WCIW relate their anticolonial ideals to the new antiwar agenda propagated in Amsterdam?

While looking at each of these cases, I also ask about the scale and impact of the activism in question. Although sometimes difficult to assess, it is imperative to look at how much of a following these activists attracted and to what extent their actions resonated with Dutch society. Hypothetically, the influence of the organizations mentioned above – the largely noncommunist PI of the late 1920s notwithstanding – was small.<sup>4</sup> This can be explained by the fact that these groups were only supported by parties on the far left side of the Dutch political spectrum, which themselves had a relatively limited following. Consider, for example, that the Dutch Communist party CPH – the largest political party in the Netherlands to support the anticolonial cause – occupied 4 out of 100 parliamentary seats at its peak.<sup>5</sup> The CPH and other communist organizations that supported anticolonial activism never attracted more than several thousand members.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the association of these activists with communist parties was out of favor in a society that was predominantly anticommunist.<sup>7</sup> The actions of the anticolonial activists studied in this thesis must be understood in this context.

This thesis is divided into five chapters. I discuss the historiographical considerations undergirding the choice for my subjects in the first chapter. After introducing the debate about anticolonial internationalism in general and the issues of class, gender and race therein, I identify the gaps that have existed so far in the scholarly literature on anticolonialism in the Dutch metropole. Based on these gaps, I briefly discuss the subjects that I aim to study, the sources I tap into and the contributions I hope to make. In the second chapter, I discuss the three main historical contexts in which the protagonists of this thesis operated: the Dutch colonies, the Dutch metropole and the arena of international anticolonialism. The third, fourth and fifth chapter touch upon the three research cases outlined above. In the

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<sup>4</sup> For the influence of the PI on the Netherlands, Indonesia and beyond see Klaas Stutje, *Behind the Banner of Unity: Nationalism and anticolonialism among Indonesian students in Europe, 1917-1931* (PhD thesis: University of Amsterdam, 2016).

<sup>5</sup> Loe de Jong, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, (Amsterdam: RIOD, 1969), I:101, 205.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 204.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 78-79, 99. Rob Woortman and Alice Boots, *Anton de Kom: Biografie 1898-1945, 1945-2009* (Amsterdam: Contact, 2009), 65-66.

conclusion, I wrap up the results of my research and make some suggestions for further research.



Image 1. *Protesting war in the Dutch capital*

The 1932 World Congress against Imperialist War in Amsterdam.

## Chapter I

### Historiography, subjects, sources, contributions

This chapter discusses the historiographical considerations that inform the structure and subject of this thesis. After introducing the debate about anti-colonial internationalism in general and the issues of class gender and race therein, I identify the gaps that have existed so far in the scholarly literature on anticolonialism in the Dutch metropole. Based on these gaps, I briefly discuss the subjects that I aim to study, the body of sources I tap into and the contributions I hope to make.

### Anticolonialism, class, race and gender

One of the central turns within colonial and global history is centered on what Marc Matera and Susan Kent have called *anti-colonial internationalisms*.<sup>8</sup> Increasingly, historians are studying interwar resistances to empire as political movements in their own right that simultaneously overlapped and intersected with other internationalisms.<sup>9</sup> Central to this inquiry are studies devoted to European and American metropolises where students, soldiers, sojourners, workers and migrants resided and interacted with one another.<sup>10</sup> Scholars have demonstrated how cities like New York, Berlin, London and Paris facilitated social networks between activists, artists or revolutionaries and fueled a counterculture in which anticolonial politics took center stage. Imperative to this body of work is the idea that Western capitals offered

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<sup>8</sup> Marc Matera and Susan Kingsley Kent, *The Global 30s: The International Decade* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 70-97. For recent scholarship on anticolonial internationalisms see Daniel Brückenhaus, 'Challenging Imperialism across Borders: Recent Studies of Twentieth-Century Internationalist Networks against Empire,' *Contemporary European History* 29 (2020), 104-115.

<sup>9</sup> The interwar period (1919-1939) is traditionally characterized as the 'internationalist moment' in world history. For a summary of the interplay between different internationalisms see Richard Carr and Bradley W. Hart, *The Global 20s: Politics, Economics and Society* (New York: Routledge, 2016); Matera and Kent, *The Global 30s*. For conceptual discussions of anticolonialism see Emile Chabal, 'Anti-Colonialism', Michael Moriarty and Jeremy Jennings, eds., *The Cambridge History of French Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 436-445; 'Anti-Colonialism', Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, eds., *Post-Colonial Studies. The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2007), 11-12.

<sup>10</sup> Starting point for this 'metropolitan' turn has been, amongst others, Jennifer Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis: The Urban Grounds of Anti-Imperialism and Feminism in Interwar Paris* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010). Other works include Minkah Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom: Radical Black Internationalism from Harlem to London, 1917-1939* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Nathanael Kuck, 'Anti-colonialism in a Post-Imperial Environment – The Case of Berlin, 1914-33,' *Journal of Contemporary History* 49:1 (2014), 134-159; Marc Matera, *Black London: The Imperial Metropolis and Decolonization in the Twentieth Century* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015); Michel Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis: Interwar Paris and the Seeds of Third World Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). A more recent body of work tends to focus on the peripheries within European metropolises. Sander van der Horst, 'Tagungsbericht: New Perspectives on Anti-colonialism in the Metropolis, 17.06.2021 – 18.06.2021 digital (Berlin)', *H-Soz-Kult*, August 2, 2021. [www.hsozkult.de/conferencereport/id/tagungsberichte-9004](http://www.hsozkult.de/conferencereport/id/tagungsberichte-9004). Consulted on December 13, 2021.



relatively more freedom in comparison to the extreme forms of oppression in the colony and thus enabled political organization. Connectedly, migrant experiences in Europe enhanced connections between minority groups across ethnic and regional lines.<sup>11</sup>

Together with this ‘metropolitan’ move, historians are progressively focusing on the transnational organizations that initiated, upended and accelerated resistances against empire in European metropolises. Initiatives like the *International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers* (ITUCNW), the *Worker’s International Relief* (WIR) and most notably the *League against Imperialism* (LAI) have received considerable attention.<sup>12</sup> This has been accompanied by an increasing awareness of and sensitivity to the role of global communism within anticolonialism. The Third or Communist International (Comintern) – the international governing body of the Soviet Union – funded and set up subsidiary organisations like the ones above to support and connect anticolonial activists. It is subject to historiographic debate, however, to which extent global struggles against empire were entirely dependent on Comintern doctrines. Some scholars argue that non-communist anticolonial activists did have a significant influence on the agenda of the Comintern.<sup>13</sup> Others demonstrate that anticolonial organizations within the Soviet ‘solar system’ were not mere extensions of Comintern foreign policy but formed part of ‘a transnational world of the Left (...) embedded in the various national contexts and at the same time strongly entangled with the cultures of the international socialist and communist movement.’<sup>14</sup>

Another but connected debate on anticolonialism centers on the political categories – most notably class, race and gender – that were prioritized in struggles against empire. Some scholars have pointed out that especially the organizations led by the Comintern understood colonialism and racial equality predominantly as be products of capitalism and

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<sup>11</sup> Matera and Kent, *Global 1930s*, 66.

<sup>12</sup> For the ITUCNW see Holger Weiss, *Framing a Radical African Atlantic: African American agency, West African intellectuals and the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2014). For the WIR see Kasper Braskén, *The International Workers’ Relief, Communism, and Transnational Solidarity: Willi Münzenberg in Weimar Germany* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). The corpus of accumulated literature on the LAI is vast. For example, see Fredrik Petersson, *Willi Münzenberg, The League against Imperialism, and the Comintern, 1925-1933*. 2 vol. (New York: Edwin Mellon Press, 2013) and the more recent volume by Michele Louro, Carolien Stolte, Heather Streets-Salter and Sana Tannoury-Karam, eds., *The League against Imperialism: Lives and Afterlives* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2020). For a summary of the historiography on the LAI see Fredrik Petersson, ‘Anti-Imperialism and Nostalgia: A Re-assessment of the History and the Historiography of the League against Imperialism,’ Holger Weiss, ed., *International Communism and Transnational Solidarity: Radical Networks, Mass Movements and Global Politics, 1919-1939* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 211-224.

<sup>13</sup> Michele Louro, *Comrades Against Imperialism: Nehru, India, and Interwar Internationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 9, 21, 67–79; Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis*, 177, 194.

<sup>14</sup> Bernhard Bayerlein, Kasper Braskén and Holger Weiss, ‘Transnational and Global Perspectives on International Communist Solidarity Organisations’, Weiss, ed., *International Communism*, 2.

class struggle.<sup>15</sup> Other historians argue that within organizations like the LAI – which were initially not yet dominated by international communism – this ‘class before race’ perspective was subject to political and ideological debate.<sup>16</sup> In addition, it has also been demonstrated that addressing race and racism was still very well possible within communist initiatives. In fact, many anticolonial activists prioritized both class and race in their struggles.<sup>17</sup> Gender, too, has been studied in relation to anticolonialism while interwar feminism and resistances to empire inspired each other.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, gender issues figured less prominently on the political agenda of organizations like the LAI. A recent volume on the League indicates that within the organization hierarchies between the sexes were accepted rather than opposed.<sup>19</sup>

Although not forming the main subject of this thesis, the historiographical debates mentioned above will inform my research when turning towards anticolonialism in the Netherlands. Especially when considering the publications and speeches by anticolonial activist, I will look at the ways in which they included or excluded gender and race.

#### Resistance in the Dutch metropole: (gaps in) the literature

Anticolonialism in the Dutch metropole has initially been studied within a larger framework of the presence of Indonesians, Surinamese and Dutch Antilleans in the Netherlands.<sup>20</sup> A second body of work on the Afro-Surinamese writer and anticolonial activist Anton de Kom has been steadily growing for the last decades and has shown the prominence of the latter in anticolonial politics in the Netherlands.<sup>21</sup> A third body of literature moves beyond the

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<sup>15</sup> Weiss, *International Communism*, 14; Weiss, *Framing a radical*, 4, 10. The historiographical debate on race and class within anticolonialism is too vast to exhaustively mention here. For a standard text on the subject see Tony Martin, ‘C.L.R. James and the Race/Class Question’, *Race* 14:2 (1972), 183-193. For a more recent account see Oleksa Drachewych, *The Communist International, Anti-Imperialism and Racial Equality in British Dominions* (London, New York: Routledge, 2019).

<sup>16</sup> Louro et al, *The League against Imperialism*, 13.

<sup>17</sup> Kasper Braskén, ‘Whether black or white – united in the fight!’ Connecting the resistance against colonialism, racism, and fascism in the European metropolises, 1926-1936’, *Twentieth Century Communism: A Journal of International History* 18:18 (2020), 126–149, here 128.

<sup>18</sup> An example is Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis*.

<sup>19</sup> Louro et al, *The League against Imperialism*, 41-42.

<sup>20</sup> For this first ‘generation’ of scholars see Harry Poeze, Cees van Dijk, Inge van der Meulen, *In het land van de overheerser, Vol I. Indonesiërs in Nederland 1600-1950* (Dordrecht, Cinnaminson: Foris, 1986); Gert Oostindie and Emy Maduro, *In het land van de overheerser, Vol II. Antillianen en Surinamers in Nederland 1634/1667-1954* (Dordrecht, Cinnaminson: Foris, 1986).

<sup>21</sup> Anton de Kom, *Wij Slaven van Suriname* (Antwerpen: Atlas Contact, 2020 [1934]); Sandew Hira, *Van Priary tot en met De Kom: De geschiedenis van het verzet in Suriname 1630-1940* (Rotterdam: Futile, 1982), 296-321; Oostindie, *In het land van*, 67-76; Nico Wijnen et al, *A. de Kom: zijn strijd en ideeën* (Amsterdam: Sranan Buku, 1989); Boots and Woortman, *Anton de Kom*; Peter van Meel, ‘Anton de Kom and the formative phase of Surinamese decolonization’, *New West Indian Guide / Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 83:3/4 (2009), 249-280; OSO, *Tijdschrift voor Surinamistiek* 29:1 (April 2010), 6-169; Gert Oostindie, ‘Kom, Cornelis Gerhard Anton de (1898-1945),’ in:

borders of Dutch empire and looks at anticolonialism from a more transnational and global perspective. Klaas Stutje has looked at the ways in which Indonesian anticolonial activism forged connections beyond the borders of the Netherlands and Indonesia. According to Stutje, activists of the organization *Perhimpunan Indonesia* ('Indonesian Association', PI) travelled extensively throughout Europe and were more at home in the international political arena of the LAI than in its national section in the Netherlands.<sup>22</sup> Other studies demonstrate how transnational developments influenced anticolonial actions in the Netherlands like the Dutch tour of the Scottsboro campaign and the *Antikoloniale Tentoonstellings Aktie* ('Anticolonial Exhibition Campaign', AKTA) in The Hague.<sup>23</sup> Anticolonial campaigns in the Netherlands also reverberated throughout other parts of the world like China. This has been demonstrated with a recent study on a campaign against a racist poem by the organization *Sarekat Peranakan Tionghoa Indonesia* ('Chinese-Indonesian Peranakan Society', SPTI).<sup>24</sup>

At least three gaps within the scholarly debate on anticolonialism in the Netherlands can be identified. First, the Dutch section of the League against Imperialism (the LAI-NL) has not been exhaustively studied.<sup>25</sup> One of the scholars touching upon this organization has been Stutje. In his analysis of the LAI-NL, however, Stutje remains limited to the participation of Indonesian anticolonial activists therein and only focusses on its early phase of the late 1920s.<sup>26</sup> Another account briefly mentions the organization in relation to the anticolonial activist Anton de Kom.<sup>27</sup> Although especially Stutje can be credited with putting the Dutch League section on the historiographical agenda, he has left out the development of the LAI-NL as a whole and as a political actor in itself, especially with regards to the early and mid 1930s.

Second, while a growing body of literature is devoted to (Chinese-)Indonesian organizations in the Netherlands on the one hand and the activism undertaken by Anton de

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*Biografisch Woordenboek van Nederland* (Amsterdam: Huygens ING, 2013); Karwan Fatah-Black, 'Rode deletie. De verstomde herinnering aan het communisme van Anton de Kom', *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 130:3 (2017), 467–483.

<sup>22</sup> Stutje, *Behind the banner*, 'Indonesian Identities Abroad: International Engagements of Colonial Students in the Netherlands, 1908-1931', *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review* 128 (2013), 151-172; 'To Maintain an Independent Course: Interwar Indonesian Nationalism and International Communism on a Dutch-European Stage,' *Dutch Crossing: Journal of Low Country Studies* 39:3 (2015), 204-220; 'Herald of a Failed Revolt: Mohammad Hatta in Brussels 1927' in: Louro et al, *The League against Imperialism*, 309-325.

<sup>23</sup> Roel op 't Ende, 'Moord! Redt de jonge negers van Scottsboro': *De Nederlandse campagne voor de Scottsboro-jongens* (M.A. thesis, Leiden University, 2015); Marin Kuijt, 'Exposing the Colonial Exhibition: Dutch Anti-Colonial Activism in a Transnational Context,' *Reinvention: An International Journal of Undergraduate Research*, 12:2 (2019).

<sup>24</sup> Tom Hoogervorst and Melita Tarisa, 'The Screaming Injustice of Colonial Relationships: Tracing Chinese Anti-racist Activism in the Netherlands,' *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde / Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia* 177 (2021), 27–61.

<sup>25</sup> I borrow the abbreviation LAI-NL from Klaas Stutje.

<sup>26</sup> Stutje, *Behind the banner*, 116-121, 142-144, 158, 163-166, 168-170, 187-190, 195-208, 211, 214-216, 218-221.

<sup>27</sup> Boots and Woortman, *Anton de Kom*, 59, 64, 162-163, 167, 169-170, 295, 512.

Kom on the other, the connection between these two has not yet been touched upon. In studies on Indonesian anticolonialism, De Kom is mentioned in mere passing.<sup>28</sup> Conversely, the anticolonial initiatives in which De Kom took part – and that mostly consisted of Indonesians – have been left out in research on the Surinamese activist.<sup>29</sup> Two tendencies in research could explain this omission. On the one hand, De Kom's biographers have characterized him as a 'maverick' in Dutch anticolonial circles.<sup>30</sup> While this might be true to a certain extent, such a perspective has too easily isolated De Kom from the anticolonial initiatives in which he – sometimes for years – partook. Other research on De Kom formulates his relation to Indonesian activists in terms of 'a coloured front'.<sup>31</sup> Terms like these can also be misleading, as they take for granted the solidarity that existed between De Kom and his fellow 'comrades'. Another, more complex perspective is necessary that goes beyond either isolating De Kom's political position or glossing over the differences between him and the anticolonial context in which he operated.

Thirdly, scholars have so far largely taken activists from the Dutch colonies residing in the Netherlands as a starting point and have then analysed the ways in which those activists travelled and thought beyond Dutch empire.<sup>32</sup> Such a perspective, however, omits the fact that activists from other colonies also used the Dutch metropole as a platform for their politics, although some minor attention has been devoted to the first Executive Committee meeting of the League against Imperialism in Amsterdam.<sup>33</sup> To further enhance our understanding of anticolonialism in the Netherlands, therefore, a perspective is needed that includes the activities of these individuals.

## Subjects, sources, contributions

### *Journals, activists and a congress*

Based on the historiographical debates and considerations mentioned above, I choose to focus in this thesis on three main subjects. To get a better understanding of the LAI-NL

<sup>28</sup> Stutje, *Behind the banner*, 12, 224; Hoogervorst and Tarisa, 'The screaming injustice', 34-37, 53, 57.

<sup>29</sup> Boots and Woortman, *Anton de Kom*, 58-59, 64, 163, 165-166, 512.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 60, 109, 155.

<sup>31</sup> Martijn Blekendaal, 'Anton de Kom (1898-1945) en Mohammad Hatta (1902-1980) – Het gekleurde front van Hatta en De Kom' *Historisch Tijdschrift*, May 2010, <https://www.historischnieuwsblad.nl/anton-de-kom-1898-1945-en-mohammad-hatta-1902-1980/>.

<sup>32</sup> Stutje, *Behind the banner*; Tarisa and Hoogervorst, 'The Screaming Injustice'. For accounts on anticolonialism in the Dutch empire against a global backdrop see Tim Harper, *Underground Asia: Global Revolutionaries and the Assault on Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020) and Kris Alexanderson, *Subversive Seas: Anticolonial Networks across the Twentieth-Century Dutch Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

<sup>33</sup> Stutje, *Behind the banner*, 160; Louro, *Comrades against Imperialism*, 67-70.

section, first, I look at its press activities between 1927 and 1932. In these years, the Dutch section published two series of journals and some individual publications. I believe that by reading these publications in the context of the developments that the LAI-NL experienced, we can gain insight in the presentation of this organization to the outside world but also to its internal dynamics. Who contributed to these journals? What subjects did they prioritize over others? How can we see these publications in light of the political dynamics within the organization? And what impact did they have on Dutch society and beyond?

Secondly, I consider the relations between Anton de Kom and three anticolonial initiatives in the Netherlands. Specifically, I look at the interplay between De Kom and the PI, the AKTA campaign and the LAI-NL in the late 1920s and early 1930s. I regard this be a suited object of analysis because De Kom entertained relations with the first organization whereas in the second and third initiative he was involved as an official member. In analysing the organizations and De Kom I specifically look at the interplay between him and the political focus of the organizations. How did these organizations influence the politics of De Kom? Reversely, to what extent did De Kom manage to put Suriname on the anticolonial agenda of these initiatives?

Looking at the presence of other anticolonial activists from the global South in the Dutch metropole, finally, I take up the case of the *World Congress against Imperialist War* (WCIW) that took place in Amsterdam in 1932. Organized by the Comintern, the congress was aimed at promoting a new anti-war agenda.<sup>34</sup> The WCIW is a suited object of analysis because the congress signified a moment during which Indian, Japanese, Chinese and other activists came together in Amsterdam. Connectedly, the WCIW hosted the last international conference of the LAI after its two world congresses in Brussels and Frankfurt.<sup>35</sup> While some minor attention has been devoted to this congress, the event as a whole and the actions of individual activists therein are still understudied.<sup>36</sup> I therefore look at WCIW from both an institutional and individual level: how did the WCIW differ from the earlier world congresses

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<sup>34</sup> For literature on the WCIW that excluded a focus on anticolonialism see Thomas Davies, *NGOs: A New history of Transnational Civil Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 114-115; Kasper Braskén, Nigel Copsey and David Featherstone, eds., *Anti-Fascism in a Global Perspective: Transnational Networks, Exile Communities, and Radical Internationalism* (New York, London: Routledge, 2021), 70, 103-104, 202; David James Fisher, *Romain Rolland and the Politics of Intellectual Engagement* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1988), 147-176.

<sup>35</sup> Petersson, *Willi Münzenberg*, II:913-920.

<sup>36</sup> Fisher, *Romain Rolland*, 159, 160, 162, 164, 165, 166, 169. Louro, *Comrades against Imperialism*, 220-223; Susan Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich: Race and Political Culture in 1930s Britain* (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), 9, 38, 75, 221, 341. For the WCIW and Indonesian activists see Stutje, *Behind the banner*, 228-229.

of the LAI? And how did individual activists from the global South relate their anticolonial convictions to the anti-war agenda of the congress?

### *Archives and sources*

In reconstructing these three cases of anticolonial activism in the Dutch metropole, I draw on an array of partly untapped sources. The first comprises the publications by the Dutch section of the League against Imperialism which form the lion's share of the primary sources of chapter III. These include the journals *Recht en Vrijheid* (1927-1928), *De Anti-Imperialist* and "*Liga*" (1932) as well as publications like manifestos and pamphlets. Whereas the complete series of *Recht en Vrijheid* and "*Liga*" can be found in the International Institute of Social History (IISH) in Amsterdam, *De Anti-Imperialist* is located in the municipality archive of The Hague.<sup>37</sup> Another part of this body of sources are the newspapers of the political organizations that stood sympathetic towards the anticolonial activists from the Dutch colonies, most notably articles from the newspaper of the Dutch communist party *De Tribune*, which are digitally available through the Dutch newspaper database *Delpher*.<sup>38</sup> I make use of the latter sources to study the statements that anticolonial activists made during public events and were afterwards written about in Dutch news outlets. The sources mentioned above, however, are to be treated with care and distance since they convey a biased self-representation of the activists in question, sometimes even painting an almost hagiographical picture of 'comradery' and 'solidarity'.

In an attempt to look behind what Klaas Stutje has called 'the banner of unity', I tap into the internal correspondence of the Dutch league section with its members and with the international secretariat of the League in Berlin.<sup>39</sup> The correspondence of the LAI-NL with its members and departments is relatively scarce but some parts of it can be found at the IISH.<sup>40</sup> The paper trail of the communication with the international secretariat is longer and is located at the digitized Comintern files from the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI) in Moscow.<sup>41</sup> In analysing the proceedings of the World Congress against

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<sup>37</sup> International Institute of Social History (IISH), Amsterdam, the Netherlands; Haags Gemeentearchief (NL-HaHGA-HGA), The Hague, The Netherlands.

<sup>38</sup> Delpher is a website providing full-text Dutch-language digitized historical news outlets mainly provided by heritage institutions. <https://www.delpher.nl/>.

<sup>39</sup> Klaas Stutje, *Behind the banner*, 2.

<sup>40</sup> See, for example, IISH, ARCH01212 – Archief Cornelis Rose, inventory number 9, Materiaal Liga tegen Imperialisme, van 1927 t/m 1933; ARCH01802 – Archief David Jozef Wijnkoop, inventory number 104, Pamfletten en circulaire van de Liga tegen imperialisme.

<sup>41</sup> The RGASPI (Russian: Российский государственный архив социально-политической истории, РГАСПИ) is a state archive based in Moscow holding all collections relating to the history of the Soviet Union. These archives have largely been digitized. <http://sovdoc.rusarchives.ru/>. For the archives of the LAI see RGASPI 3/5, 542 – Anti-Imperialist League, inventory 1 committee of the anti-imperialist League.

Imperialism, I make use of a combination of documents from the RGASPI, the WCIW archive of the IISH and contemporary news articles about the congress.<sup>42</sup> Two main problems with this body of sources can be mentioned. First, these documents were written by authors that were strongly biased towards communism and anticolonial activism. Moreover, they do only partly convey the actual state of affairs within the Dutch League section. After all, its members did not want to run the risk of handing crucial information on a silver plate to the authorities in the case of interception. Connectedly, the anticolonial activists mentioned in this thesis were well aware of the state surveillance to which they were subjected. Because of this, they often wrote under pseudonyms, frequently changed addresses and – out of fear of interception – only shared their most important information when meeting in person. This makes it hard to fully reconstruct the conversations that activists had with one another behind closed doors.

In a substantial amount of cases, however, anticolonial activists could not prevent interception or infiltration. Paradoxically enough, the sources from the Dutch governmental and colonial agencies therefore contain the lion's share of information on meetings held by anticolonial activists. The documents written by these agencies form the third and last body of sources of this thesis. Institutions like the secret services of the Netherlands (the *Centrale Inlichtingen Dienst*, CID) and the Dutch East Indies (the *Algemeene Recherche Dienst*, ARD), the Dutch Ministry of Colonies and dignitaries like the governor of Suriname stood in close contact with one another. Taken together, they constituted a security apparatus that closely monitored the anticolonial activists in the Dutch metropole, colonies and beyond.<sup>43</sup> The sources of the CID have been reconstructed and made digitally available by the Huygens Institute for the History of the Netherlands (Huygens ING).<sup>44</sup> The documents issued by the ARD can be found in the four-volume source publication *Politiek-politioneele overzichten* edited by Harry Poeze.<sup>45</sup> The archives of the Ministry of Colonies and the governor of Suriname are located at the Dutch National Archives (NA) in The Hague.<sup>46</sup> These sources, however,

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<sup>42</sup> RGASPI 3/5/543/1 – International Antifascist Organisations, 19, 20, 21 – Material and information on the on the international anti-war congress; IISH, ARCH01661 – World Congress against the Imperialist War Collection.

<sup>43</sup> The CID was founded in 1919 to trace leftist political activity in the Netherlands. In the interwar period the agency extended its espionage to anticolonial networks and entertained close relations with the governors of Suriname and Curaçao and the attorney-general of the Dutch East Indies. De Jong, *Het Koninkrijk*, I:50-51.

<sup>44</sup> Algemeen Rijksarchief (AR), The Hague, The Netherlands, Rapporten Centrale Inlichtingendienst 1919-1940.

<sup>45</sup> Harry A. Poeze, *Politiek-politioneele overzichten van Nederlandsch-Indië 1927-1941*, 4 vols. (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1982-1994). From March 1927 onwards, the head of the ARD would send a highly secret bimonthly overview from the colonial capital Batavia to the highest Dutch colonial officials in Asia. One copy was forwarded to the Dutch Ministry of Colonies in The Hague. Poeze, *Politiek-politioneele overzichten*, I:vii-x.

<sup>46</sup> Nationaal Archief (NA), Den Haag, Ministerie van Koloniën: Openbaar Verbaal, nummer toegang 2.10.36.04; Archief van de Gouverneur van Suriname: Afdeling Kabinet Geheim, 1885-1951 (1952), nummer

also need to be read from a critical distance, since many authors of reports by the security agencies tended to think in top-down schemes in which anticolonial activists merely followed ‘Moscow’, hence robbing them partly of their agency. I realize that all three bodies of sources used for this thesis have their limits. Thus, the challenge lies in reading sources with care and alongside each other in order to strive towards a balanced reconstruction.

### *Contributions of this thesis*

With this thesis, I aim to contribute to three historiographical debates. By studying the LAI-NL, first, I aim to add a hitherto unstudied part to the now burgeoning literature on the international League against Imperialism. Focusing on the Dutch section and its publication adds a national perspective to a largely transnational or global organization and, in addition, to the scholarly work on the ‘print culture’ of the international League.<sup>47</sup>

Secondly, by focusing on the interactions between anticolonial activists from the Dutch colonies, I contribute to a larger debate on Dutch colonial history. Increasingly, historians of Dutch empire are acknowledging that it should be seen as an integrally connected whole. Crucial for this understanding, they argue, is to go beyond a colonial topography of Dutch empire dividing *De West* (the Dutch West Indies) and *De Oost* (the Dutch East Indies) into separated entities.<sup>48</sup> Hence, looking at the connections between Surinamese and Indonesian anticolonial activists could help to partly correct this unwarranted separation.

Thirdly, I believe that treating events like WCIW as anticolonial moments can contribute to adding the perspective of the global South to initiatives that have until now mostly been regarded as exclusively European- or Western-led. If we agree with Michele Louro’s statement that scholarship ‘on international movements for peace in the interwar period remains strikingly scarce’, the role of anticolonialism therein can only be scarcer.<sup>49</sup> Hence, touching upon actions of anticolonial activists at the WCIW could fill a small part of this void. Connectedly, because this thesis includes the actions of anticolonial activists from

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toegang 2.10.18. The Ministry of Colonies received briefings, mail and other documents on a daily basis. These would be archived in *verbalen* (files) and then stored in the chronological order in which they were received.

<sup>47</sup> For his last topic see Fredrik Petersson, “‘Why We Appear’: The Brief Revival of The Anti-Imperialist Review”, *Viewpoint Magazine*, February 1, 2018, <https://viewpointmag.com/2018/02/01/appear-brief-revival-anti-imperialist-review/>.

<sup>48</sup> See the historiographical discussion in Rutger van der Hoeven, ‘Een integraal verbonden rijk. Vernieuwend onderzoek naar kolonialisme’, *De Groene Amsterdammer*, volume 144, number 41 (October 7, 2020) 36-39.

<sup>49</sup> Louro, *Comrades against Imperialism*, 219.



the global South that operated in the Netherlands, it could push scholarly debates about ‘globalizing’ Dutch interwar history in general and Dutch imperial history in particular.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> See, for example, Matthijs Kuipers, *A Metropolitan History of the Dutch empire, 1850-1940* (PhD diss., Utrecht University, 2018); Lex Heerma van Voss, Marjolein 't Hart, Karel Davids, Karwan Fatah-Black, Leo Lucassen and Jeroen Touwen, eds., *Een wereldgeschiedenis van Nederland* (Ambo|Anthos: Amsterdam, 2019), 11-16. It is quite telling that despite growing historical attention for Dutch interwar colonialism a recent historical work – which is praised as ‘the first real point of reference on Dutch culture during the interwar period’ – plainly excludes the influence of Dutch imperialism. Frits Boterman, *Tussen Utopie en Crisis: Nederland in het Interbellum 1918-1940* (Amsterdam: De Arbeiderspers, 2021).

## Chapter II

### Anticolonialism in the Dutch metropole, colonies and beyond

This chapter presents three distinctive but overlapping historical contexts: the political situation in the Dutch colonies, the state of affairs in the Dutch metropole and the sphere of international interwar anticolonialism. In discussing the interplay between these contexts, I aim to lay bare the continuously changing backdrop against which the protagonists of this thesis unfolded their anticolonial politics.

#### The rise of resistance (1926-1928)

##### *The Dutch East Indies and the LAI(-NL)*

In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Dutch East Indies witnessed three consecutive but overlapping anticolonial movements. These were the *Sarekat Islam* (League of Islam, SI) in the 1910s, the *Partai Komunis Indonesia* ('Communist Party of Indonesia', PKI) in the 1920s and the *Partai Nasional Indonesia* ('Nationalist Party of Indonesia', PNI) in the 1930s.<sup>51</sup> Meanwhile, the *Perhimpunan Indonesia* ('Indonesian Association', PI) became the most vocal critic of Dutch empire in the Netherlands throughout the 1920s while it also extended its activities to international anticolonial politics.<sup>52</sup> Among the PI's most prominent members were its chairman Mohammad Hatta (1902–1980) and Soetan Sjahrir (1909–1966), who joined in 1922 and 1929 respectively. Hatta later became Indonesia's first vice-president (1945-1956) while Sjahrir functioned as its first prime minister (1945-1947).<sup>53</sup>

In the Netherlands, anticolonialism had been on the radar of practically all leftist parties. Especially Dutch communists advocated for complete and immediate independence. From 1925 to 1930, the largest of these parties was split into two rival factions, the *Communistische Partij Holland* ('Dutch Communist Party', CPH) of Louis de Visser and the

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<sup>51</sup> A.P.E. Korver, *Sarekat Islam, 1912-1916. Opkomst, bloei en structuur van Indonesië's eerste massabeweging* (Amsterdam: Historisch Seminarium, 1982); Ruth McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism* (Ithaca: Equinox 1965); John Ingleson, *Road to Exile: The Indonesian Nationalist Movement, 1927-1934* (Kuala Lumpur, Hongkong: Heineman, 1979). For a comprehensive summary of all three of these movements see David van Reybrouck, *Revolusi: Indonesië en het ontstaan van de moderne wereld* (Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 2020), 98-128.

<sup>52</sup> Stutje, *Behind the banner*, 9.

<sup>53</sup> See the autobiographical accounts Mohammad Hatta, *Verspreide geschriften*, C.P.J. Van der Peet, ed., (Djakarta, Amsterdam, Surabaya: Penerbitan dan Balai Buku Indonesia, 1952); Soetan Sjahrir, *Indonesische overpeinzingen*, Maria Sjahrir-Duchâteau, ed., (Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 1987 [1945]) and the recent Soetan Sjahrir, *Wissel op de toekomst: brieven van de Indonesische nationalist aan zijn Hollandse geliefde* (Van Oorschot: Amsterdam, 2021).

*Communistische Partij Holland – Centraal Comité* (CPH-CC) of David Wijnkoop.<sup>54</sup> After the two factions had reunited, the CPH reached its peak with the 1933 parliamentary elections, that delivered the party 4 out of 100 parliamentary seats. The CPH would consist of 6000 members, predominantly from Amsterdam.<sup>55</sup> Smaller in size but entertaining close ties to Indonesian anticolonial activists were the *Revolutionair Socialistische Partij* ('Revolutionary Socialist Party', RSP) of Henk Sneevliet (1833-1942) and independent socialists like Henriette Roland Holst (1869-1952).<sup>56</sup> The largest leftist party in the Netherlands was the *Sociaal Democratische Arbeiders Partij* ('Dutch Social Democratic Worker's Party', SDAP) which received a quarter of all the votes in the interwar parliamentary elections.<sup>57</sup> The SDAP, however, was very hesitant to advocate for immediate independence of the Dutch colonies and argued instead for societal restructuring and political democratization, although members of the left wing of the SDAP did challenge this standpoint.<sup>58</sup> The SDAP's reservations did not make the party very popular in both anticolonial and communist circles and the social democrats quickly became a favourite target of anticolonial activists in the Netherlands.<sup>59</sup>

Resistance in the interwar Dutch East Indies reached its zenith during mass uprisings on Java and Sumatra in 1926 and 1927. The colonial establishment violently repressed the revolts, exiled hundreds of protestors to the new internment camp *Boven-Digoel* and outlawed the PKI and other organizations.<sup>60</sup> At around the same time, the *League against Imperialism and for National Independence* (LAI) was established at its First World Congress in Brussels on February 10, 1927.<sup>61</sup> The LAI's central aim was to connect and support the struggles of anticolonial activists from the global South, national minorities in Europe and the working

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<sup>54</sup> De Jong, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog* (Amsterdam: RIOD, 1969), I:101, 205; Joop Morriën, *Indonesië los van Holland. De CPN en de PKI in hun strijd tegen het Nederlandse kolonialisme* (Pegasus: Amsterdam, 1982).

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Fritjof Tichelman, *Henk Sneevliet 1888-1942: Een politieke biografie* (Amsterdam: Van Gennep, 1974), 56-57, 74-75, 95. Both Sneevliet and Holst were closely engaged with the League against Imperialism about which they would write a substantial amount of letters. *Waarom schrijf je nooit meer? Briefwisseling Henriette Roland Holst – Henk Sneevliet*, Nico Markus, ed., (IISG: Amsterdam, 1995), 48, 50, 195, 196, 283, 285, 296, 308, 320, 349, 369, 374, 375, 382, 391, 397, 399, 400-403, 405, 425, 428, 429, 455, 496, 499, 501, 519, 521-524. For Sneevliet and Holst on the Dutch section of the League see 350, 397, 455, 496 and 501.

<sup>57</sup> Fritjof Tichelman, 'Socialist "Internationalism" and the Colonial World: Practical Colonial Policies of Social Democracy in Western Europe before 1940 with Particular Reference to the Dutch SDAP' Frits van Holthoorn and Marcel van der Linden, eds., *Internationalism in the Labour Movement: 1830-1940*, edited by (Leiden: Brill, 1988) 87-108.

<sup>58</sup> Stutje, *Behind the banner*, 198.

<sup>59</sup> Erik Hansen, 'The Dutch East Indies and the Reorientation of the Dutch Social Democracy, 1929-1940', *Indonesia* 23 (April 1977) 70, 73-75; Poeze, *In het land*, 261.

<sup>60</sup> Van Reybrouck, *Revolusi*, 111-112.

<sup>61</sup> Louro et al, *The League against Imperialism*, 17.

class of colonizing nations.<sup>62</sup> With the conflict in the Dutch East Indies raging on, the LAI put Indonesia high on its political agenda. Indonesian anticolonial activists gladly made use of this situation. Hatta became a member of the League's Executive Committee, tying the small PI from the university city of Leiden to global anticolonial networks in Europe and beyond. Ultimately, 'Brussels' consolidated the PI's political position as European outpost of Indonesian nationalist organizations.<sup>63</sup>

The Dutch section of the League against Imperialism (LAI-NL) was founded on the 25<sup>th</sup> of July 1927 in Amsterdam.<sup>64</sup> The Dutch section included Dutch leftist groups (communists, left wing social democrats and 'oppositional' communists) as well as Indonesian and Chinese activists.<sup>65</sup> The PI, however, remained hesitant to cooperate with its Dutch allies because of the sectarian struggles between them and because it feared the agenda of the LAI-NL would be dominated by Dutch political actors.<sup>66</sup> At the same time, the Dutch authorities feared the subversive – in their eyes purely communist – actions of the PI members. The government eventually incarcerated them and put them on trial from September 23, 1927 until March 8, 1928.<sup>67</sup> This crackdown, which made the participation of the prominent PI members in the LAI-NL impossible, sparked Dutch leftist campaigns that advocated for the release of the Indonesians.<sup>68</sup> This broad leftist support for the Indonesian cause, however, could not prevent a political split between Dutch communists and social democrats within the Dutch League.

#### *The end of the first LAI-NL*

Although initially lackluster about the LAI, the Comintern – the international governing body of the Soviet Union – gained an increasing interest in the initiative. The headquarters of the League were stationed in Berlin (the 'Comintern village in Europe') where the German communist Willi Münzenberg managed its daily affairs.<sup>69</sup> While Moscow gained a foothold within the LAI, the Comintern gradually changed its political doctrine. Becoming disappointed in its 'united front policy' or 'Second Period' (1923-1928) – which advocated

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<sup>62</sup> To this end, the LAI started circulating news bulletins, published its own organ (*The Anti-Imperialist Review*) and organized anticolonial campaigns. Ibid, 22.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 155.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 164. The Netherlands would fall into the category 'small European states with legal possibilities' of the international League. Petersson, *Willi Münzenberg*, II:735.

<sup>65</sup> Dutch members included Edo Fimmen, J.D.L. Le Febvre, Henriette Roland Holst, P.J. Schmidt and Simon de Jong. Indonesian members included, amongst others, Mohammad Hatta. The Chinese members were Tung Tieng Hiang and Han Tiauw Kie. Stutje, *Behind the banner*, 166.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 165.

<sup>67</sup> These members were Mohammad Hatta, Nasir Pamontjak, Abdoel Madjid and Abdoel Rachman.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 198.

<sup>69</sup> Kuck, 'Anti-colonialism,' 143; Petersson, 'Hub of the Anti-Imperialist,' 49.

for political cooperation between all leftist factions – the Comintern adopted what came to be known as the ‘class against policy’ or ‘Third Period’ (1928-1935).<sup>70</sup> This new strategy consisted of a militant and ultra-leftist stance towards other political actors, designating non-communist leftist movements – most notably the social democratic one – as ‘social fascists’ that had to be challenged as much as fascism and national-socialism.<sup>71</sup>

The new Comintern strategy proved disastrous for the LAI and its national sections, including the LAI-NL. Not only would the League be plagued by nefarious internal discord but also by opposition from other political organizations. Both the social democratic counterpart of the Comintern, the *Labour and Socialist International* (LSI), and its Dutch member, the SDAP, reacted to the LAI and LAI-NL. The LSI published a report on the LAI’s communist connections which greatly harmed the public reputation of the organization.<sup>72</sup> Shortly thereafter, the SDAP declared membership with the LAI irreconcilable with that of the SDAP out of fear for communist encroachment.<sup>73</sup> As a result, the social democratic members of the LAI-NL resigned in April 1928, after which the PI – did not want to get caught up in the hair-splitting and exited the fold as well.<sup>74</sup> The PI, however, remained a member of the international League as it represented the only viable platform for the Indonesians to advance their agenda.<sup>75</sup>

#### Communist revitalization (1928-1932)

##### *The second LAI-NL and ‘Frankfurt’*

After a year of silence, the LAI-NL was revived at the insistence of the communist headquarters in Berlin.<sup>76</sup> The PI and the Dutch communist members of the LAI-NL agreed that the provisional board would be equally divided between the Dutch and Indonesians and the PI would get the leading positions.<sup>77</sup> However, any definitive plans of the LAI-NL were postponed until after the Second World Congress of the League in Frankfurt from the 20<sup>th</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Weiss, *International Communism*, 67; Louro et al, *The League against Imperialism*, 27.

<sup>71</sup> Stutje, *Behind the banner*, 223.

<sup>72</sup> Louro et al, *The League against Imperialism*, 27.

<sup>73</sup> Stutje, *Behind the banner*, 202.

<sup>74</sup> Projektgroep Literatuursociologie I, *Links Richten tussen Partij en Arbeidersstrijd* (Nijmegen: University of Nijmegen, 1975), 63-65. These members were P.J. Schmidt, Paul Kiès and Jef Last. The PI kept close ties with leftist-socialists like Holst and social democrats and kept publishing in their journals like *De Socialist* and *De Nieuwe Weg*. Poeze, *In het land van*, 216.

<sup>75</sup> Stutje, *Behind the banner*, 207-208.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 203.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. The Indonesians were Abdullah Soekoer (chair), Roestam Effendi (1<sup>st</sup> secretary), Ticalu Pandean, Moechsin and Roesbandi (members). The Dutch members of the LAI-NL were the anti-militarist Gé Nabrink (2<sup>nd</sup> chair) and the communists G.J. van Munster (2<sup>nd</sup> secretary), dr. H. Koch (administrator), Jac. Bot and P. van Alsada (members).

to the 27<sup>th</sup> of August, 1929. Fourteen Indonesians – mostly PI members – attended this congress together with two Dutch members of the LAI-NL and fourteen other delegates from the Netherlands.<sup>78</sup> The event proved to be a bitter disillusionment as conflicts among communists and between the latter and other leftist members ensued. These tensions continued in the Dutch section and – out of discontent with the sectarian conflicts – Abdullah Soekoe stepped down as chairman of the LAI-NL in January 1930. Three months later, the PI left the LAI-NL once again.<sup>79</sup> Meanwhile, the colonial authorities in the Dutch Indies had made any association of local organisations with the international League impossible.<sup>80</sup> In fact, one day after the first session of ‘Frankfurt’ the Dutch colonial authorities raided the offices of the labour union *Sarekat Kaoem Boeroeh Indonesia* (‘Indonesian Workers Union’, SKBI), the only organisation in Indonesia that openly supported the LAI.<sup>81</sup>

Despite the strong influence of international communism on the LAI it was not a ‘front organization’ under the directives of a specific communist party.<sup>82</sup> Rather, the League was a ‘sympathizing organization’ which meant that it tried to exert influence outside of the communist movement by forging alliances with other leftist partners and presenting an explicitly non-communist image to the public while keeping communist members to a certain minimum.<sup>83</sup> To that end, the LAI was one of the few ‘sympathizing organizations’ in the international communist orbit with the right to return to a ‘united front policy’ in 1930.<sup>84</sup> The Comintern, realizing that the League was politically divided and organizationally crippled after ‘Frankfurt’, allowed for new connections to be forged with other leftist factions. Ultimately, however, the political control over the LAI was strictly kept in communist hands and the communist international secretariat in Berlin remained at the helm of the decision-making.<sup>85</sup>

### *New activists and the ‘third’ LAI-NL*

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<sup>78</sup> For this event see Stutje, *Behind the banner*, 115-158.

<sup>79</sup> The only actions taken by the LAI-NL during this second period were an anti-imperial youth conference and a series of protests against the arrest of nationalists (including Soekarno). Both took place in Amsterdam, the traditional stronghold of the LAI-NL. Local departments of the LAI-NL, like the one in Haarlem, continued their work after the PI left.

<sup>80</sup> This followed from a decree that stated that any connection with international organizations was prohibited in the Dutch East Indies. Petersson, *Willie Münzenberg*, II:742.

<sup>81</sup> Stutje, *Behind the banner*, 202, 216.

<sup>82</sup> Fredrik Petersson, *We are neither Visionaries, nor Utopian Dreamers: Willi Münzenberg, the League against Imperialism and the Comintern, 1925-1933* (PhD diss., Åbo Akademi University, 2013), 34-38, 47-50, 109. Examples of Dutch front organizations were the *Internationale Rode Hulp* (International Red Aid, IRH) and *Internationale Arbeiders Hulp* (International Worker’s Relief, IAH).

<sup>83</sup> Stutje, *Behind the banner*, 143.

<sup>84</sup> Petersson, *Willie Münzenberg*, II:764-765.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

In the early 1930s, communist influences gained the upper hand in both the PI and international League. The former was increasingly taken over by its communist members of whom the most notable were Roestam Effendi, Setiadjit Soegondo, Achmad Soebardjo, Mas Soedario Moewalladi, Mohammad Ilderem and Moehamad Tamzil.<sup>86</sup> Ultimately, Hatta's mandate to represent the PI at the LAI was repealed in March 1931.<sup>87</sup> One month later, the communist Abdulmadjid Djojoadhiningrat became president of the PI and Hatta was officially expelled from the international League while Djojoadhiningrat succeeded him.<sup>88</sup> Disillusioned by these hostile takeovers and realizing their limited maneuvering space in Europe, both Hatta and Sjahrir left the PI and travelled back to the Dutch East Indies in November 1931 to continue their anticolonial struggle there.<sup>89</sup>

Almost simultaneously, the Dutch section saw its third establishment on December 20, 1931. Once aligned with the CPH, the LAI-NL received funds from the international League as well as free publicity through the CPH's daily *De Tribune*.<sup>90</sup> Despite this new impetus, the international position of the Dutch section remained fragile because its connections with the Dutch East Indies were severely hampered with the expulsion of Hatta and other non-communist PI members. In addition, the LAI took a blow when its International Secretariat in Berlin was raided and ransacked by the German police in December 1931.<sup>91</sup> Thrown back on its national and local connections, the LAI-NL integrated itself more and more in the communist landscape of the Netherlands.

Two new actors emerged within this communist landscape. The first was the Afro-Surinamese Anton de Kom (1898–1945), a writer and activist who had arrived in the Netherlands in 1921. After having worked as a soldier, consultant and sales representative, De Kom became involved in anticolonial activism. His political career culminated in *Wij Slaven van Suriname* (1934), a historical treatise on Suriname.<sup>92</sup> An indictment of the exploitation of the country's population, De Kom's book later proved to be important for Surinamese activism of the 1960s.<sup>93</sup> From the late 1920s onwards, De Kom showed strong political sympathies towards the PI, CPH and the LAI-NL, becoming an important figure in the latter. De Kom's relation with the Dutch communists remained ambiguous, however, as

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<sup>86</sup> Poeze, *In het land van*, 250-252.

<sup>87</sup> Stutje, *Behind the banner*, 220; Poeze, *Politiek-politioneele overzichten*, III:82.

<sup>88</sup> Poeze, *In het land van*, 250-251.

<sup>89</sup> Stutje, *Behind the banner*, 221.

<sup>90</sup> Poeze, *In het land van*, 188; 247, 250.

<sup>91</sup> Petersson, *Willie Münzenberg*, II:764-765.

<sup>92</sup> Anton de Kom, *Wij Slaven van Suriname*.

<sup>93</sup> Van Meel, 'Anton de Kom', 263.

he never (publicly) was a member of the party and always denied having been so.<sup>94</sup> The last organization to join this group of anticolonial organizations in the Netherlands was the *Sarekat Peranakan Tionghoa Indonesia* ('Chinese-Indonesian Peranakan Society', SPTI) which was established in 1932.<sup>95</sup> The SPTI ranked among its most important members the communists Tjoa Sik Ien (1907–1987) and Tan Ling Djie (1904–1969).<sup>96</sup>

Like the non-communist Indonesian activists before them, the communist anticolonial activists looked beyond Dutch empire. The Scottsboro campaign, for example, was a global protest movement pushing back against the trial of nine young Afro-American men who had been sentenced to death after alleged rape.<sup>97</sup> Ada Wright – the mother of two of the boys – travelled through the Netherlands, often in the company of Anton de Kom and other anticolonial activists.<sup>98</sup> Another event was the AKTA in the Hague (see chapter IV) which was part of a larger anti-imperial campaign directly orchestrated by the international LAI.<sup>99</sup> Last but not least, the *World Congress against Imperialist War* that took place in Amsterdam in 1932 brought together Dutch and Indonesians with activists from India, Japan and elsewhere. The congress catapulted a global anti-war movement that was to be united with the League's anticolonial agenda.<sup>100</sup> The extent to which this movement was influential is subject to historical debate but it achieved some 'success' in appealing beyond the communist movement, especially among British social democratic circles.<sup>101</sup>

### The end of opposition (1933-1937)

#### *Revolt and oppression in East and West*

On the waves of the 1929 economic crisis and subsequent austerity measures, the year 1933 marked two watershed episodes in Dutch colonial history. On February 4, a mutiny took place on board of the Dutch warship *De Zeven Provinciën* on the coast of Sumatra, shocking the governments in both the Dutch East Indies and the Netherlands. After a week of negotiations, the colonial authorities responded by bombing the vessel, killing 23 and

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<sup>94</sup> It is subject to debate to what extent De Kom saw communism as a genuine political doctrine or as a mere vehicle for his politics. See Karwan Fatah-Black, 'Rode deletie' as well as Boots and Woortman, *Anton de Kom*, 69, 70, 72 for two conflicting positions on the matter.

<sup>95</sup> Tarisa and Hoogervorst, 'The screaming injustice', 34.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>97</sup> Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, 75.

<sup>98</sup> Op 't Ende, 'Moord! Redt de jonge', 35-43.

<sup>99</sup> Kuijt, 'Exposing the Colonial'.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 913-920.

<sup>101</sup> Davies, *NGOs: A new history*, 266-267.



wounding many more.<sup>102</sup> The event attracted a considerable amount of Dutch press attention – only paralleled by the uprisings and incarceration of the PI board in the late 1920s – and sparked an outcry among the Dutch and international Left.<sup>103</sup> Both the LAI and LAI-NL started organizing campaigns aimed at ‘amnesty’ for the sailors that had been captured after the mutiny was quelled.<sup>104</sup> Shortly thereafter, the most prominent nationalists in the Dutch East Indies (i.e. Soekarno, Mohammad Hatta and Soetan Sjahrir) were detained and exiled within the archipelago which tied the death knot of any public opposition until after WWII.

Just four days after the mutiny in the Dutch East Indies, an uprising took place in Suriname. The protest came after an economic crisis on the island of Curaçao had forced the Surinamese working at its oil refineries to return home. The activists from the British West Indies they had met on the island inspired them to set up anticolonial initiatives like the *Surinaamsche Algemeene Werkers Organisatie* (‘Surinamese Workers Organization’, SAWO) and the newspaper *De Banier van Waarheid en Recht* (‘The Banner of Truth and Right’, DBWR).<sup>105</sup> The *Februari-opstand* (‘February Uprising’) of 1933 was sparked by the arrival of Anton de Kom in Suriname and his subsequent incarceration by the authorities. The colonial establishment reacted with violence, fatally shooting two people and wounding dozens.<sup>106</sup> De Kom was eventually exiled to the Netherlands. Later on, the DBWR stopped its activities in 1936 when its chief editor was incarcerated. A year later, Louis Doedel – one of the most prominent anticolonial figures in the colony – was forced into a mental asylum.<sup>107</sup> As a result, anticolonial activity in Suriname came to a definitive standstill in the late 1930s.

#### *Effendi, De Kom and the end of the LAI(-NL)*

In the Netherlands, the 1933 parliamentary election was affected by the quelled mutiny in the Dutch East Indies. The CPH was keen on spearheading the issue and one of the central anticolonial figures emerging at this time was the Indonesian Roestam Effendi (1903-1979). Effendi had come to the Netherlands in 1927 when facing persecution as a communist

<sup>102</sup> Loe de Jong, *Het Koninkrijk*, I:56-178.

<sup>103</sup> Independent socialist Henriette Roland Holst organized a committee in defense of the prosecuted sailors, which would also be sending material to Indonesia. Henk Sneevliet, would even spend time in a Dutch jail due to remarks on the mutiny. Tichelman, *Henk Sneevliet*, 75.

<sup>104</sup> For the impact of the mutiny on Dutch society see Hans Blom, *De Muiterij Op de Zeven Provinciën: Reacties en Gevolgen in Nederland* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005).

<sup>105</sup> Hans Buddingh, *De geschiedenis van Suriname* (Amsterdam: Rainbow, 2012), 249-261.

<sup>106</sup> Boots and Woortman, *Anton de Kom*, 99-135; Rosemarijn Hoefte, *Suriname in the Long Twentieth Century: Domination, Contestation, Globalization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 69-91.

<sup>107</sup> Archie Sumter et al, *K'ranti! De Surinaamse pers 1774-2008* (Amsterdam: KIT, 2008), 79-102; Nizaar Makdoembaks, *Journalist Louis Doedel kaltgesteld in Wolffenbuttel – Politieke psychiatrie in de kolonie Suriname* (Alphen aan de Rijn: De Woordenwinkel, 2021).

politician after the uprisings on Java and Sumatra.<sup>108</sup> As PI chairman and LAI-NL secretary, he soon became an important figure within the anticolonial communist landscape. The apex of Effendi's anticolonial career was his entrance – representing the CPH – into Dutch parliament, becoming the first parliamentarian of colour in Dutch history and one of the youngest at the time.<sup>109</sup>

At around the same time, Anton de Kom actively engaged with fellow Surinamese. Early 1934, De Kom chaired meetings of the LAI-NL department in the city of The Hague during which Afro-Surinamese, Hindustani Surinamese and Afro-American members of the Dutch League section were present.<sup>110</sup> De Kom also forged connections with Otto Huiswoud (1893-1961) in the early 1930s.<sup>111</sup> The Afro-Surinamese Huiswoud, cofounder of the American Communist Party, briefly lived in Amsterdam as editor of the journal *The Negro Worker* in 1934 and 1935.<sup>112</sup> Simultaneously, De Kom got in touch with the *Bond van Surinamers in Nederland* (League of Surinamese in the Netherlands, BSN).<sup>113</sup> The latter wrote for both *The Negro Worker* and the BSN journal *Surinamers in Nederland* ('Surinamese in the Netherlands').<sup>114</sup>

In the mid and late 1930s, anticolonial activism in the Netherlands dwindled. This was partly due to the newly adopted 'popular front' strategy of the Comintern which called for 'anti-fascist' alliances with socialist and more liberal parties.<sup>115</sup> In the colonies too, anti-imperialist 'fronts' were to be realized with moderate partners. The CPH and PI dropped their demand for the immediate independence of the Dutch colonies. This was aptly symbolized by the fact that the PI changed the name of its journal from *Indonesia Merdeka* to *Indonesia* while the CPH dropped the last word *Nu* (Now) of its slogan *Indonesië los van Holland Nu*.<sup>116</sup> Around the same time, the LAI-NL ceased to exist and the activist Anton de Kom – who suffered from mental problems – started to focus more on his literary than on his

<sup>108</sup> Poeze, *In het land van*, 250; Stutje, *Behind the banner*, 223.

<sup>109</sup> J.Th. Petrus Blumberger, *De nationalistische beweging in Nederlandsch-Indië* (Haarlem: Tjeenk Willink, 1931), 160-161; Poeze, *In het land van*, 252.

<sup>110</sup> Oostindie, *In het land van*, 70, 124; Rudie Kagie, *De eerste neger* (Amsterdam: Mets & Schilt, 2006), 84-85, 184.

<sup>111</sup> Boots and Woortman, *Anton de Kom*, 218-225; Weiss, *Framing a radical*, 573-687. Frits Corsten, 'Otto Huiswoud en de internationale arbeidersbeweging,' *Onvoltooid Verleden*, 1 (January 1997) 49-56; Oostindie, *In het land van*, 60-65.

<sup>112</sup> Weiss, *Framing a radical*, 32, 629-636, 640-641.

<sup>113</sup> BSN members were William Manhoef, Godfried J.A. Telegraaf, Wilhelm Does, August Sunkar, Hendrik Smit, J.A.P.E. Moezel. Another person named 'Prins Kaya' disseminated its organ. Roy Wijks, 'Eerherstel in naam van een kostbare vriendschap', Anton de Kom-Abraham Behr Instituut, ed., *A. de Kom: zijn strijd en ideeën* (Amsterdam: Sranan Buku, 1989), 41-54.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>115</sup> Weiss, *International Communism*, 65-55.

<sup>116</sup> Stutje, *Behind the banner*, 226. Due the change in course of the CHP the *Revolutionair Socialistische Arbeiderspartij* (Revolutionary Socialist Workers' Party, RSAP) of Henk Sneevliet practically remained the only political party to oppose Dutch empire in the late 1930s. Tichelman, *Henk Sneevliet*, 95.

political work.<sup>117</sup> On an international level, the LAI had been struggling to regain its initial anticolonial zeal while being forced to flee from the German national-socialist government in 1933. It first chose Paris and then London as its operative center.<sup>118</sup> Reginald Bridgeman, secretary of the British League section and prominent member of the LAI, became its supervisor. Four years later, the LAI drew to a definitive close in 1937.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Boots and Woortman, *Anton de Kom*, 257.

<sup>118</sup> Petersson, *Willi Münzenberg*, II:964-967.

<sup>119</sup> Louro et al, *The League against Imperialism*, 28-30.

### Chapter III: Resistance in print

#### The publications of the LAI-NL (1927-1932)

In this chapter, I trace the press activity of the Dutch section of the League against Imperialism from 1927 to 1932. Who were the authors behind these journals and which topics did they prioritize over others? How do these publications relate to the political dynamic of the organization that issued them? And what impact did these publications have on Dutch society and beyond? By answering these questions, I aim to partly lay bare the political visions and the inner dynamics of this anticolonial organization.

#### A battle journal: *Recht en Vrijheid* (1927-1929)

From September 10, 1927 until June 23, 1928 the LAI-NL published its bimonthly journal *Recht en Vrijheid* ('Justice and Freedom', ReV). ReV ran for 21 issues, together with a separate issue meant for free distribution and a *mededeelingenblad* ('announcement leaflet') from September 1928. The issues were all in Dutch and mostly consisted of pages. The secretariat and the editorial boards of ReV was located in Amsterdam and was in the hands of the social democrat S. de Jong. and P. J. Schmidt.<sup>120</sup> Later on, Schmidt took over both functions and was eventually succeeded by the communist G.J. van Munster when the former exited the LAI-NL in April 1928.<sup>121</sup> ReV was primarily financed through subscriptions, for which people would sign up during the public meetings of the LAI-NL. If the issues would be funded in another way, e.g. through subsidies of the leftists political parties that stood close to the journal, cannot be stated with any certainty. Sales of ReV probably did not exceed a 100 issues per Dutch city (see *Size and impact* below).

#### *Mission statement*

ReV unfolded its aim and vision on the front page of its first issue:

'Our work will consist first of all in the strongest possible protest and resistance against the persecution, exploitation and mistreatment of the Indonesian proletarians and nationalists and the greatest possible propaganda for *Recht en Vrijheid* for the Indonesian people. However, we will by no means ignore the imperialism of other governments, the oppression and exploitation of other peoples. (...) We thereby hope to make *Recht en Vrijheid* a battle journal, and also a well-stocked arsenal, in

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<sup>120</sup> *Recht en Vrijheid*, volume 1, number 1 (September 10, 1927), 1.

<sup>121</sup> Stutje, *Behind the banner*, 202.

which all those who are weighed down by colonial rule have the weapons available to fight imperialism (...). We particularly hope to arouse the interest of the Dutch workers in what is happening in Indonesia, and to involve them in our struggle.’<sup>122</sup>

A few things become clear from this ‘mission statement’. First, the people behind ReV saw itself primarily as constituting an initiative of solidarity between the Netherlands and Indonesia. It would, second, not be limited by this ‘intra-imperial’ focus but extended its scope towards other territories of the global South. The journal of the LAI-NL, thirdly, translated one of the central aims of the international League – forging connections between the European working class and colonized peoples – to a specific Dutch context. Based on this premise, ReV imagined its primary audience to be both Indonesian and Dutch. Surprisingly, ReV prioritized reaching out to Indonesian readers (‘making the greatest possible propaganda’) over connecting with readers from the Netherlands. As the Indonesian population would predominantly not be able read the Dutch language in which ReV was written, however, this goal was destined to fail from the very start.<sup>123</sup>

#### *The authors of ReV*

Who wrote for ReV? The countries of origin of its contributors can be roughly divided into four main categories: i) the Netherlands ii) Indonesia iii) the United Kingdom and iv) authors from other parts of the global South.

In absolute terms, the authors from the global South outnumbered those from Europe, with the Indonesian group being the largest (see figure 1). This constellation corresponds with the focus of ReV, with a primary focus on Indonesia and a secondary on the rest of the global South. It also suggests that ReV wanted to represent itself as consisting of a very diverse ‘writing crew’. The Dutch group, however, was the largest in terms of ‘volume’ as it was responsible for more than half of all articles (see figure 2). Within this group, the only female author – independent socialist Henriette Roland Holst – wrote the most articles.<sup>124</sup>

The second largest group to contribute to ReV consisted of Indonesian authors. This is not surprising, considering the fact that the PI held the secretariat of the LAI-NL and that

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<sup>122</sup> Emphasis in original. ‘Recht en Vrijheid!’, *Recht en Vrijheid*, volume 1, number 1 (September 10, 1927), 1. Unless mentioned otherwise, all translations in this and the following chapters are my own.

<sup>123</sup> Kees Groeneboer, ‘Nederlands-Indië en het Nederlands’, Kees Groeneboer, ed., *Koloniale taalpolitiek in Oost en West: Nederlands-Indië, Suriname, Nederlandse Antillen en Aruba* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1997), 55-84, here 72-73.

<sup>124</sup> Other prominent writers were the communist Jef Last, a former resident of Sumatra J.D.L. Le Febvre and ReV’s editor, P.J. Schmidt.

the main political focus of ReV was directed towards Indonesia. The incarceration of the PI members took place less than two weeks after ReV was launched.<sup>125</sup> This crackdown made any public participation of Indonesians in both the LAI-NL and ReV hard. Hence, most Indonesian contributions were either written anonymously by the PI or by Indonesians that did not reside in the Netherlands, like the PI member Soebardjo (under the pseudonym Abdul Manaf), the communist Semaoen and the lawyer Moeljatno.<sup>126</sup> Publications by the incarcerated PI members had to be postponed until after their release, as becomes clear from an article of Mohammad Hatta that was planned for 1927 but only came out in April 1928.<sup>127</sup>

The third largest group to contribute was British. Apparently, the LAI-NL entertained close relations with its British counterpart as the articles written by British writers would directly address or relate to the Dutch section. A letter by the British socialist politician and secretary of the international LAI Archibald Fenner Brockway, for example, hails the arrival of the Dutch section and the work done by the Dutch social democrats therein.<sup>128</sup> Apparently, the LAI-NL wanted this piece to be the introduction of its activities to the wider Dutch audience, as it claimed to have copied the Brockway article 10,000 times ‘for free dissemination’.<sup>129</sup> In a second instance, an article with the title ‘And yet another simple soul!’ contained a letter from the socialist politician H.N. Brailsford to ReV’s editor P.J. Schmidt, in which the former reacted to an earlier letter from the latter, wishing him ‘every prosperity to your Review’.<sup>130</sup> These and other contributions reveal that Dutch social democratic members of the LAI-NL were eager to demonstrate that the League and ReV were suited platforms for staging noncommunist solidarity.<sup>131</sup> Such a strategy was useful in a political climate within which parties like the SDAP were hesitant to cooperate with organizations they regarded to be dominated by communists.

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<sup>125</sup> ReV was launched on September 10, 1927 while the PI members were arrested on September 23.

<sup>126</sup> See, for example, Abdul Manaf, ‘Ontwikkelingstendenzen in de Indonesische Vrijheidsbeweging’, *Recht en Vrijheid*, volume 1, number 1 (September 10, 1927), 2-3; Semaoen, ‘Over de non-coöperatie beweging in Indonesië’, *Recht en Vrijheid*, volume 1, number 11 (January 28, 1928), 3; Moeljatno, ‘Hoe “Inlanders” worden afgemaakt’, *Recht en Vrijheid*, volume 1, number 17 (April 21, 1928), 7-8.

<sup>127</sup> Mohammad Hatta, ‘Het antikoloniale congres te Brussel in het licht der Wereldgeschiedenis’, *Recht en Vrijheid*, volume 1, number 16 (April 7 1928), 1.

<sup>128</sup> A. Fenner Brockway, ‘De internationale der gekleurde volkeren’, *Recht en Vrijheid*, volume 1, number 2 (September 24, 1927), 1-2.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>130</sup> ‘... En nòg een eenvoudige ziel’, *Recht en Vrijheid*, volume 1, number 4 (October 22, 1927), 2.

<sup>131</sup> See, amongst other articles, Rajani Palme Dutt, ‘Het Britse imperialisme in Indonesië’, *Recht en Vrijheid*, volume 1, number 1 (September 10, 1927), 3; H.N. Brailsford, ‘De van God gegeven Engelschen’, *Recht en Vrijheid*, volume 1, number 8 (December 17, 1927), 1-2.

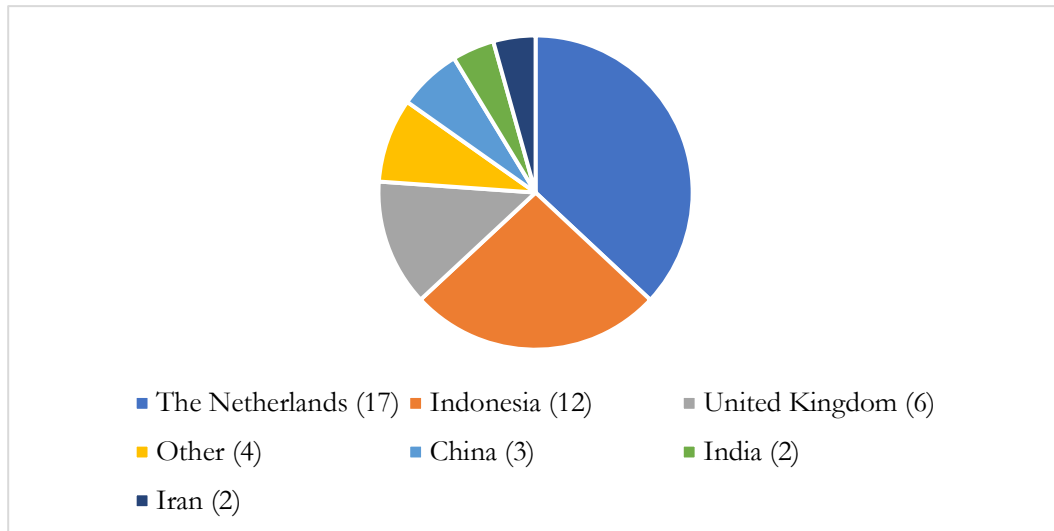


Figure 1. Where did the authors of ReV come from?

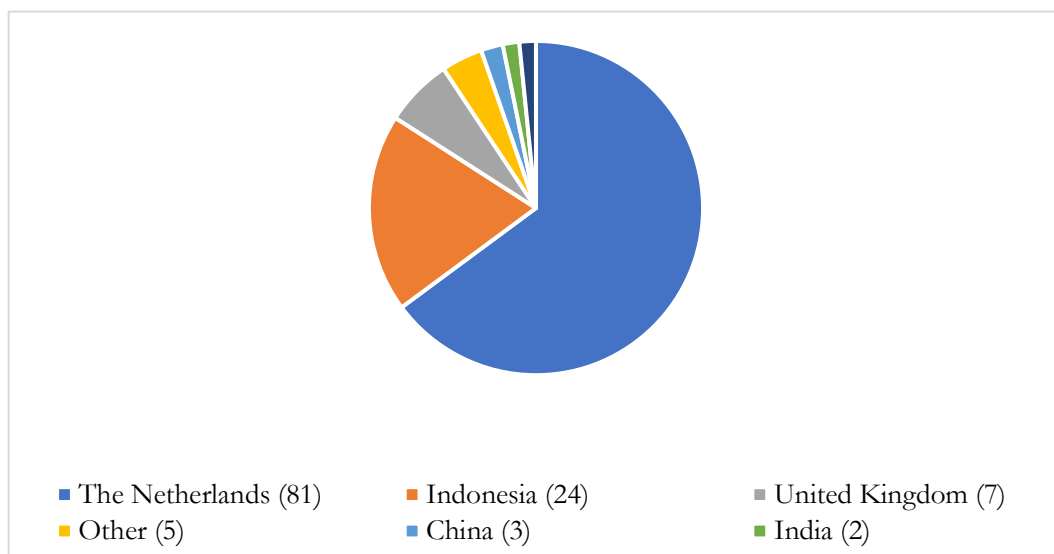


Figure 2. How many articles of ReV did each group write?

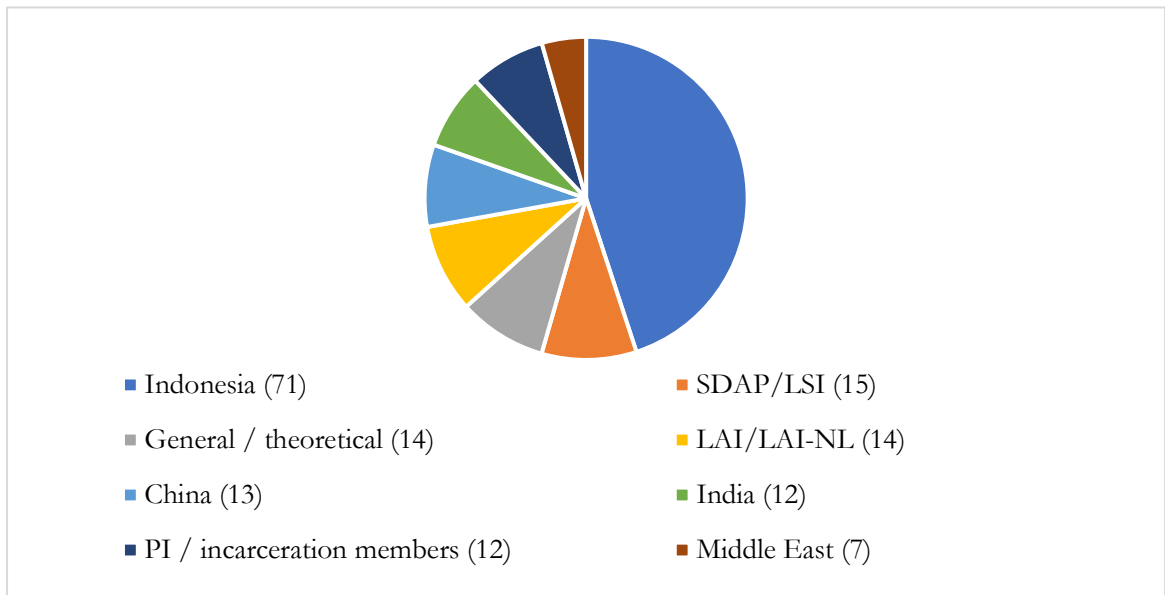


Figure 3. What subjects did ReV touch upon?

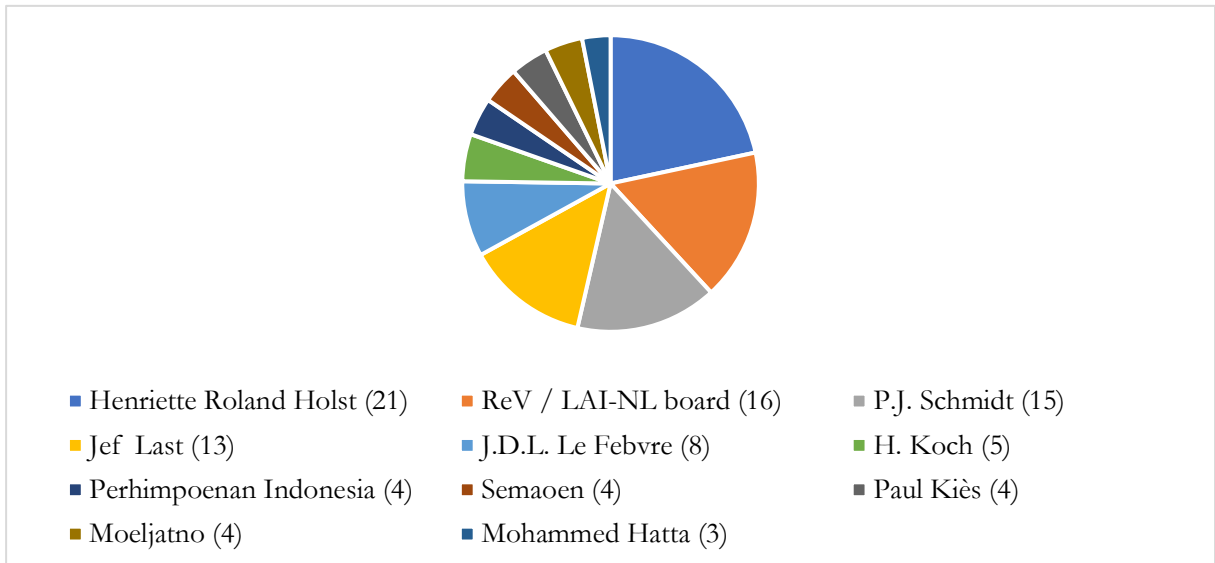


Figure 4. Who were the largest contributors to ReV?



The fourth group of contributors consisted of activists from other parts of the global South. Two pieces were written by the Indian authors Jawaharlal Nehru and Shapurji Saklatvala.<sup>132</sup> Nehru had a prominent position within the LAI as member of its executive council and it is hence safe to assume that his article circulated through the networks of the League.<sup>133</sup> Saklatvala was the first Indian member of the British parliament and a prominent member of the League's section in England.<sup>134</sup> His article might have been forwarded by its British members to the LAI-NL for publication. Another group consisted of Chinese authors: the communist Liao Han Sin, the Indonesian-Chinese journalist T'Ang Leang Li and Chen Kuen, the leader of an alliance of sailors.<sup>135</sup> It is not sure how these articles became part of ReV but it could have been that the Chinese members of the LAI-NL – Tung Tieng Hiang and Han Tiau Kie – received and translated them.<sup>136</sup> Other contributors from the global South included authors from Iran (the activist Achmad Assadoff and the socialist politician Soleiman Mirza), South Africa (the unknown author L. Burns), Venezuela (the professor Salvador de la Plaza) and Japan (writer and feminist Yamakawa Kikue).<sup>137</sup>

Taken together, these articles from the global South demonstrate that ReV sought to live up to its claims of including other anticolonial struggles beyond the Indonesian one. To what extent these pieces were the fruit of political ties with anticolonial activists beyond Dutch empire, however, is not clear. In any case, each of the authors from the global South 'group', only published in ReV once. It is hence more likely that most of them circulated through the network of the LAI for its sections to be translated and published.

### *The subjects of ReV*

ReV consisted of a broad range of contributions. These can be subdivided into four main categories: i) articles on specific cases of colonial oppression or exploitation ii) reflections on the nature of imperialism iii) calls for solidarity from and updates on the development of the

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<sup>132</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, 'De politieke situatie in Brits-Indië', *Recht en Vrijheid*, volume 1, number 11 (January 28, 1928), 4; Shapurji Saklatvala, 'De Simon-Commissie', *Recht en Vrijheid*, volume 1, number 19 (May 26, 1928), 2-4.

<sup>133</sup> For the role of Nehru within the international League see Louro, *Comrades against Imperialism*, 65-102.

<sup>134</sup> For Saklatvala within the LAI and the British section see Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, 146-199.

<sup>135</sup> Liao Han Sin, 'De toestand in China', *Recht en Vrijheid*, volume 1, number 3 (October 8, 1927), 5; T'Ang Leang Li, 'China in Opstand', *Recht en Vrijheid*, volume 1, number 5 (November 5, 1927), 11-12; Chen Kuen, 'Het oorlogsgevaar in het Verre Oosten', *Recht en Vrijheid*, volume 1, number 18 (May 12 1928), 5.

<sup>136</sup> For further information on Tung Tieng Hiang and Han Tiau Kie see Stutje, *Behind the banner*, 166.

<sup>137</sup> Achmad Assadoff, 'De politieke situatie in Perzië', *Recht en Vrijheid*, volume 1, number 6 (November 19, 1927), 3; Soleiman Mirza, 'De politieke situatie in Perzië', *Recht en Vrijheid*, volume 1, number 12 (February 11, 1928), 1-2; L. Burns, 'Gekleurde en blanke arbeiders in Zuid-Afrika', *Recht en Vrijheid*, volume 1, number 20 (June 9, 1928), 5; Salvador de la Plaza, 'De strijd tegen het imperialisme in Latijns-Amerika', *Recht en Vrijheid*, volume 1, number 9 (December 31, 1927), 4-5; Yamakawa Kikue, 'Uit Japan: De toestand der arbeidende vrouwen in Japan', *Recht en Vrijheid*, volume 1, number 18 (May 12, 1928), 7. The latter article was translated by the author into English and then probably disseminated throughout the networks of the LAI.

LAI(-NL) and iv) artistic productions like poems, illustrations, images and photographs. Across these categories, the articles focused on specific countries and colonies. The three largest subjects were Indonesia, China and India.

ReV mostly touched upon the Dutch East Indies (see figure 3). The lion's share was devoted to timely issues that took place in the wake of the uprisings on Java and Sumatra. The execution of seven communist Indonesians, the internment camp of *Boven-Digoel*, mistreatment of Indonesian workers and the incarceration of the PI members in the Netherlands received considerable attention. A special type of article was reserved for unmasking the political 'hypocrisy' of the Netherlands, as it presented itself to be a democratic nation without allowing for proper representation of its colonized electorate.<sup>138</sup> ReV included articles closer to the Netherlands, most notably on the tensions with the international and Dutch social democrats in relation to immediate Indonesian independence.

ReV also devoted a considerable amount of attention to the civil war in China and British imperialism in India (see figure 3). These contributions were not only written by the Indian and Chinese authors but also by the Dutch LAI-NL.<sup>139</sup> This was not a coincidence. Both China and India were important countries for the international LAI because it regarded these countries – together with Indonesia – to harbor the largest potentially anti-imperial mass of the globe. Connectedly, the Chinese and Indian delegations were the largest and second largest from the global South to attend the 1927 Brussels congress.<sup>140</sup> Among the ranks of LAI-NL personal connections had also been forged with China and India, as the Indonesian activists entertained relations with prominent figures from both of these countries.<sup>141</sup>

#### *Race, gender and the Dutch West Indies*

At least three subjects are conspicuous by their (almost complete) absence in ReV. The first is race. How can we explain the omission of this topic in a journal that primarily concerned itself with the oppression of people of colour? The most probable reason lies in the ideological frame of reference of ReV's contributors. As all of the writers behind the journal

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<sup>138</sup> See, for example, J.D.L. Le Febvre, 'Aan een kamerlid wordt de toegang tot meer dan 9/10 van het "Rijk der Nederlanden" onttrokken! Een onhoudbare toestand', *Recht en Vrijheid*, volume 1, number 1, (September 10, 1927), 6; Louis de Visser, 'Een volksvertegenwoordiger die niet in Nederlands-Indië wordt toegelaten!', *Recht en Vrijheid*, volume 1, number 4 (October 22, 1927), 7-8.

<sup>139</sup> Each Dutch ReV contributor took on a different subject. Jef Last, for example, wrote most of the poems and pieces on China while J.D.L. Le Febvre – a former colonial administrator on Sumatra – exclusively covered maltreatment of Indonesian workers on Sumatran plantations.

<sup>140</sup> Stutje, *Behind the banner*, 146-147.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

adhered to leftist worldviews, they prioritized the category of class over race. Hence, they placed economic and not racial relations at the root of colonial issues. This did not mean, however, that race was not mentioned at all. Consider, for example, this passage by Henriette Roland Holst:

‘The methods, which have become habitual for the bourgeoisie against the exploited masses of another race, will irrevocably also be applied to the proletarians of their own race, as soon as they actually resist their exploitation and oppression.’<sup>142</sup>

In this passage, race is used to express a reciprocity between two groups and to communicate to Dutch readers that they too will be directly affected by colonial violence. Meanwhile, the idea of race is not used to problematize colonial oppression. As Holst writes in another article:

‘You are one, comrades, with the masses of Indonesia. But their suffering is infinitely worse than yours. Here [in the Netherlands] the exploitation is tempered by traditions, morals, democratic thoughts (...) There [in the Dutch East Indies] is nothing, or almost nothing, of all that. The exploitation is cruel, horrific, inhumane beyond compare.’<sup>143</sup>

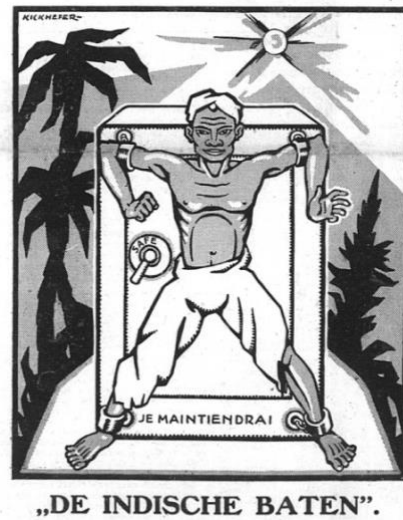
Here, the degree to which Dutch and Indonesians are subjected to economic and political exploitation is what sets them apart. That race was also a part of this equation is glossed over or simply not prioritized. This would be the case in almost all of the articles in ReV.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Henriette Roland Holst, ‘Fascisme en koloniale overheersching’, *Recht en Vrijheid*, volume 1, number 11 (September 10, 1927), 11.

<sup>143</sup> Henriette Roland Holst, ‘Aan de socialistische arbeiders’, *Recht en Vrijheid*, volume 1, number 5 (November 5, 1927), 6.

<sup>144</sup> One exception was an article written on Apartheid in South Africa, which criticized the ‘racial hatred’ between groups in the country. This article, however, was not written by a LAI-NL member. L. Burns, ‘Gekleurde en blanke arbeiders in Zuid-Afrika’, *Recht en Vrijheid*, volume 1, number 20 (June 9, 1928), 5.



Images 2 to 5 (clockwise from the top left). *Messages from Recht en Vrijheid*.

Note the references to the hanging of Indonesian communists (down left), the prison camp *Boven-Digoel* (top right) and the motto of the Netherlands (*Je maintiendrai*) on a safe on which an Indonesian is chained (down right).

Another missing element is gender, since the issue of colonized women is not covered. This silence can be attributed to the fact that the LAI-NL, like its international counterpart, was a homosocial milieu in which hierarchies between the sexes were reproduced rather than challenged.<sup>145</sup> This is exemplified in the composition of the journal: although the female author Henriette Roland Holst contributed the most to ReV, all other articles were written by men, sexcept for Yamakawa Kikue. Consequently, only two pieces touch upon the issue of women, whereby one is written by Holst and the other by Yamakawa.<sup>146</sup>

Suriname and the Dutch Caribbean, thirdly, are simply not included in the many reflections on Dutch imperialism of ReV. Apparently, the people behind the journal did not regard 'the other side of Dutch empire' to be of any substantial importance, despite the fact that Mohammad Hatta was in touch with the Surinamese writer Anton de Kom around the time the first issues of ReV were published (see chapter IV). In this regard, the LAI-NL did not deviate from the official agenda of the international League, which also omitted the other overseas territories of the Netherlands.

#### *A heterodox platform?*

As becomes clear from its mission statement, ReV saw itself as a media outlet primarily constituting the pivot between the colonized Indonesians and the Dutch working class. To that end, the journal sought to convince Dutch workers of the reciprocity between their fate and that of the Dutch East Indies.<sup>147</sup> It also tried to show that it offered room to all (leftist) ideologies and parties that claimed to represent the Dutch working class. In a bid to create such a public image, ReV regularly allowed for self-critical discussions to take place among its members and between the latter and political 'outsiders'. In one instance, Holst devotes hers words directly to the social democratic party SDAP which is hesitant to work with the Dutch section because its fears communist encroachment:

‘Surely you yourself know that – assuming that [the communist] influence existed – you only have to set an example by breaking it if you join the League? You will only have to move one finger and you will push the communist element to the background.’<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Louro et al, *The League against Imperialism*, 40-41.

<sup>146</sup> Henriette R. Holst, 'Aan de vrouwen der bourgeoisie!', *Recht en Vrijheid*, volume 1, number 6 (November 19, 1927), 5. Yamakawa Kikue, 'Uit Japan: De toestand der arbeidende vrouwen in Japan', *Recht en Vrijheid*, volume 1, number 18 (May 12, 1928), 7. The latter article was translated and sent to the Dutch section.

<sup>147</sup> See, for example, A. de Vries, 'De arbeiders en de Koloniale Onderdrukking', *Recht en Vrijheid*, volume 1, number 8 (December 18, 1927), 3.

<sup>148</sup> Henriette R. Holst, 'Aan mijn oude strijdmakkers in de SDAP', *Recht en Vrijheid*, volume 1, number 3 (October 8, 1927), 6.

On the page directly opposite of Holst's piece, the prominent SDAP member Frank van der Goes published a reply by admitting that 'some socialists work together with some communists' but also stated that 'seclusion in a certain company is an unavoidable necessity'.<sup>149</sup> In addition, most critique of the SDAP – filling several pages of every ReV issue – came from one of its own members, P.J. Schmidt.<sup>150</sup> In several articles, Schmidt would invite other members of the SDAP or leaders of labour unions to 'revise their opinion' on the LAI-NL.<sup>151</sup>

These and other examples show that ReV represented itself as a heterodox platform on which varying leftist positions on anticolonialism could be voiced and heard. This begs the question to what extent this image of a 'negotiation space' was not just a façade behind a predominantly communist-led organization. It can be argued that in the initial phase of ReV this was not yet the case. Indeed, leftists social democrats held considerable sway over both the LAI-NL and the ReV, e.g. the SDAP member P.J. Schmidt as the editor of the journal and secretary of the organization. Communism, then, was still one leftist current among others. This dynamic changed, however, when the social democrats left both the LAI-NL and ReV. The communists G.J. van Munster and H. Koch were quick to seize control over the journal as its editor and secretary respectively. They kept the ReV on largely the same course, only adding strong attacks on the former Dutch members that had left.<sup>152</sup> These later issues, however, kept silent about the exit of the PI. Probably, the editors behind ReV – a journal that prided itself as the forebearer of anticolonialism in the Netherlands – did not want to lose face by openly admitting the departure of the Indonesian 'colonized'.

### *Size and impact*

What do the journals of the LAI-NL tell us about the size of the organization and the amount of subscribers of ReV? One could make an estimation of the scale of the LAI-NL based on the announcements made in the ReV, although these numbers cannot be double-checked by other sources. According to the ReV, the LAI-NL had departments in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Amersfoort, Leiden and Haarlem.<sup>153</sup> The departments in Haarlem and Rotterdam counted 15 and 50 members respectively.<sup>154</sup> The LAI-NL experienced a rise in subscriptions due to the tour the Dutch section made with the Indonesian activists after their release from

<sup>149</sup> Emphasis in original. F. van der Goes, 'Antwoord aan Henriette Roland Holst', *Recht en Vrijheid*, volume 1, number 5 (November 5, 1928), 6.

<sup>150</sup> P.J. Schmidt, 'De Vakbeweging en het Oosten', *Recht en Vrijheid*, volume 1, number 1 (September 10, 1927), 7; 'De SDAP en de Liga', *Recht en Vrijheid*, volume 1, number 5 (November 5, 1928), 2-3.

<sup>151</sup> P.J. Schmidt, 'Het NVV en de Liga', *Recht en Vrijheid*, volume 1, number 6 (November 19, 1927), 1.

<sup>152</sup> H. Koch and G.J. van Munster, 'Verklaring', *Recht en Vrijheid*, volume 1, number 18 (May 12, 1928), 1; Louis de Visser, 'Indonesië in het parlement', *Recht en Vrijheid*, volume 1, number 21 (June 23, 1928), 4-7.

<sup>153</sup> 'Afdeelingen', *Recht en Vrijheid*, volume 1, number 13 (February 25, 1928), 8.

<sup>154</sup> 'Afdeelingen', *Recht en Vrijheid*, volume 1, number 15 (March 24, 1928), 1.

prison. In Amsterdam, 61 new members were signed up during this tour, followed by Haarlem (38), Amersfoort (25) and Leiden (14).<sup>155</sup> How many people subscribed to ReV is unsure. In one instance, ReV claimed to publish a free issue in 10,000 copies but it is not sure if the journal actually reached this target. It can be assumed that the sales of ReV did not exceed an amount of 100 issues. In one case, for example, the journal praised a member for selling 80 issues in Leiden which it claimed to be the highest amount in the country.<sup>156</sup>

Taken together, these numbers indicate that where the LAI-NL operated, the amount of members and subscribers comprised not more than a maximum of a hundred people. Compared to the total amount of members from the Dutch leftist parties, the LAI-NL was small. Consider, for example, that communist parties and labour unions amounted to approximately 20,000 members at the time.<sup>157</sup> Would one add the SDAP – the party of some of the prominent LAI-NL members – the LAI-NL is further dwarfed by the 44,000 members the party had and the 811,000 votes it received during the 1929 parliamentary elections.<sup>158</sup> Hence, one can conclude that the Dutch league section not only operated on the fringes of the Dutch but also on that of the leftist political landscape.

Did ReV realize the ‘greatest possible propaganda for the Indonesian people’? If they existed at all, the connections between the Dutch East Indies and the journal were severely limited. For one, ReV did not receive most of its information directly from the colony but worked predominantly on the basis of information from Dutch colonial newspapers. The journal, however, twice claimed to have received ‘a number of requests for subscriptions from Indonesia.’<sup>159</sup> ReV admitted that in order to send issues to Indonesia it needed to raise the prices of the issues for those wanting ReV to be delivered in the colony.<sup>160</sup> Even if the journal got across to the Dutch East Indies, however, it would probably never have reached its readers. After all, the censors were reported to stop issues of ReV.<sup>161</sup> Lastly, there was also the issue of language. As mentioned above, only a small minority of the Indonesian people spoke Dutch. Had they arrived in the Dutch East Indies, the issues of ReV were unintelligible for a large portion of its intended audience. It is thus safe to say that ReV did not have any impact beyond the borders of the metropolitan Netherlands. Despite claiming ‘the strongest

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<sup>155</sup> ‘Schitterend geslaagde vergaderingen der Liga’, *Recht en Vrijheid*, volume 1, number 16 (April 7, 1928), 7.

<sup>156</sup> ‘De Liga groeit!’, *Recht en Vrijheid*, volume 1, number 12 (February 11, 1928), 1.

<sup>157</sup> De Jong, *Het Koninkrijk*, I:96-97.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> ‘Abonnees in Indonesië’, *Recht en Vrijheid*, volume 1, number 6 (November 19, 1927), 1; volume 1, number 7 (December 3, 1927), 1.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Poeze, *Politiek-politioneele overzichten*, II:154. This censorship came in addition to a general decree that made all public ties in the Dutch Indies with the LAI illegal. AR, 2.09.22, inventory number 16666, Jaargang 1929. Overzicht no. 5. Geheim., (July-August 1929), 17.

possible protest' against the colonial oppression of the Dutch East Indies to be its main *raison d'être*, ReV had to accept a remaining as a minor leftist journal on the fringes of the Dutch media landscape.

Four months after the PI had quit the LAI-NL, ReV published its last issue in June, 1928. What had led to its demise? The most important reason was financial. In a report on the section, the Dutch secret service stated that because of its campaigning, the Dutch section had 'booked a negative balance of more than 1400 guilders' in June 1928, forcing the LAI-NL to directly stop publishing ReV.<sup>162</sup> The exit of both the leftist social democrats and the PI members could also have contributed to the fall of the journal. According to coverage of ReV itself, the speeches made by the editor P.J. Schmidt and the appearance of Indonesian activists during LAI-NL meetings secured the sale of journals.<sup>163</sup> When both the PI members and Schmidt left, therefore, ReV lost its two of its most important promoters and organizers, which could have indirectly led to the demise of the journal.

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<sup>162</sup> AR, 2.09.22, 16648, 7.

<sup>163</sup> 'Schitterend geslaagde vergaderingen der Liga', *Recht en Vrijheid*, volume 1, number 16 (April 7, 1928), 7.





Images 6 to 11. *Critical assemblage*

Portraits of contributors to *Recht en Vrijheid*. Clockwise from the top left: Achmad Soebardjo, Jawaharlal Nehru, Jef Last, Chen Kuen, Mohammad Hatta and Henriette Roland Holst.

### Intermezzo: two issues and a manifesto (1928-1931)

While the LAI-NL had stopped publishing ReV in June 1928, one last issue came out in October in the form of a *mededeelingenuitgave* ('announcement issue'). Printed on poor paper and consisting of only four pages, it contained a report on a conference of the Dutch section which had taken place in Amsterdam on September 9.<sup>164</sup> During this event, general statutes were adopted that would later fall into the hands of the Dutch secret service.<sup>165</sup> The congress, however, could not hide the nefarious state of the Dutch section. Only 22 people attended the congress and most of them lamented the sectarian conflicts and the financial shortages that plagued the organization.<sup>166</sup> A month after the PI had joined the LAI-NL for the second time, the LAI-NL issued a four-page *extra nummer* (extra issue) of ReV in April 1929 devoted to the Indian independence struggle and the internment camp *Boven-Digoel*.<sup>167</sup> However, the Dutch section had decided to await any important decisions – and hence press activity – until after the League's Second World Congress in Frankfurt later that year. After the congress, the section was inspired by the arrest of many prominent nationalists in the Dutch East Indies and the LAI-NL issued a manifesto in the beginning of 1930 that called upon 'workers and intellectuals' to push back against 'the murderous regime of the Dutch government in Indonesia!'<sup>168</sup> According to the Dutch secret service, which intercepted the manifesto, the LAI-NL claimed to have printed the document 100,000 times to be disseminated through the whole of the Netherlands.<sup>169</sup> Although it consisted of only two pages, the LAI-NL apparently conceived of it as the kickstart of a massive national campaign. This ambitious plan was nipped in the bud, however, when the PI left the LAI-NL once again in April 1930. Although local departments of the LAI-NL remained functioning after the Indonesian exit, it took until the end of 1931 for another national Dutch section to be officially established, once again in cooperation with the PI.<sup>170</sup> Only in the beginning of 1932, the organization started to publish new journals.

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<sup>164</sup> It also included one article about the situation in the internment camp *Boven-Digoel*, which was copied from another Dutch newspaper *Onthullingen inzake het Digoelkamp*, *Recht en Vrijheid Mededeelingenuitgave* (October 2, 1928), 4.

<sup>165</sup> AR, 2.09.22, inventory number 16648, [Overzicht no. 1 1929.], 1.

<sup>166</sup> *Recht en Vrijheid Mededeelingenuitgave* (October 2, 1928), 1-2.

<sup>167</sup> IISH, COLL00284 – Documentatiecollectie Solidariteitsbewegingen in Nederland, inventory number 27, Organisaties K-L, Liga tegen Imperialisme en Koloniale Overheersching, 'Weg met de dwingelandij!', *Recht en Vrijheid* (April 1929).

<sup>168</sup> AR, 2.09.22, inventory number 16675, [Manifest Liga tegen Imperialisme en voor Koloniale Onafhankelijkheid.], document number 21464, February 4 1930, The Hague, 2-3.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>170</sup> AR, 2.21.244 Ruijs de Beerenbrouck, inventory number 113, Jaargang 1933. Overzicht no. 1. Geheim., 46-47.

### Brief revival: *De Anti-Imperialist* and “*Liga*” (1932)

One of the few initiatives of the international LAI in 1931 was the re-launch of its organ *The Anti-Imperialist Review* from September onwards.<sup>171</sup> Inspired by this undertaking and in the run-up to an anti-imperialist congress in August (see chapter V) the LAI-NL decided to publish new journals. Instead of bimonthly, the issues were published on a monthly basis. Between January and August 1932, the LAI published three issues of *De Anti-Imperialist* (DAI) and two issues of “*Liga*”.<sup>172</sup> The secretariat of both journals was situated at Hendrik Zwaardercroonstraat 114 in The Hague and was placed in the hands of the communist PI member Soedario Moewalladi.<sup>173</sup> The two kinds of journals did not only differ in name. DAI was printed on poorly readable paper and consisted of only four pages whereas “*Liga*” echoed the setup of the ReV series with similar professional paper and the same amount of eight pages. Probably to keep printing costs to a bare minimum, both journals were not illustrated.

#### *Mission statement*

Like with ReV, DAI included a mission statement on the front page of its first issue:

‘League membership is based on one fundamental condition, namely to wage a consistent struggle against imperialism, a struggle that excludes any compromise, and which ends only with the acquisition of absolute independence of the colonies and oppressed nationalities.’<sup>174</sup>

What becomes apparent from this statement is that it was formulated in very general terms. In contrast to ReV, DAI did not specifically address the Indonesian struggle for independence to be its main focus nor did it target the Indonesian or Dutch working class as its audience. Moreover, this statement was directly followed by a six-point political programme that had been hammered out in the fall of 1931 by the International Executive Committee of the international League in Berlin. In four of the five issues, the same text of this programme was published.<sup>175</sup> These aspects suggest that the original aim of ReV as ‘heterodox platform’ had been replaced by a strategy that predominantly marched to the tune of the international and predominantly communist League.

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<sup>171</sup> Petersson, *Willie Münzenberg*, II:856; Petersson, “‘Why We Appear’”.

<sup>172</sup> The quotation marks were part of the title of “*Liga*”.

<sup>173</sup> *De Anti-Imperialist*, volume 1, number 3 (April 1932), 4; Poeze, *Politiek-politioneele overzichten*, III:145.

<sup>174</sup> ‘Wat is de Liga tegen Imperialisme?’, *De Anti-Imperialist*, volume 1, number 1 (January 1932), 1.

<sup>175</sup> *De Anti-Imperialist*, volume 1, number 1 (January 1932), 1; volume 1, number 2 (February 1932), 4; “*Liga*”, volume 1, number 1 (May 1932), 1; “*Liga*”, volume 1, number 2 (August 1932), 7.

### *Anonymous authors*

Nothing substantial can be said about the identity or number of people that contributed to the DIA and “*Liga*” since all but one articles were written by anonymous authors.<sup>176</sup> This lack of information could have served to hide the fact that the crew behind the LAI-NL was now exclusively communist. As a ‘sympathizing organization’, however, the Dutch section could not afford to openly admit being a fully communist-run enterprise. As no members of other leftist backgrounds remained in the section, all it could do was to opt for anonymously communicating with its wider Dutch audience, in the hope that non-communist sympathizers of the organization would still be attracted to its politics. The names of the authors can also have been omitted because of security reasons. Already in 1930, the local intelligence service of The Hague had infiltrated in the departments of the Dutch section (see chapter IV). In order to not attract any unwanted attention to its individual members, then, the Dutch section might have chosen to keep the identity of the authors secret.

### *Subjects of DAI and “Liga”*

DAI and “*Liga*” covered five main issues: i) the development of the international and Dutch League ii) the Japanese invasion of China iii) the state of affairs in Indonesia iv) the oppression of peoples with origins in Africa, i.e. the ‘Black Atlantic’ and v) a diverse set of topics that received minor attention (Ireland, India and ‘national minorities’). Of these subjects, the developments of the international and Dutch Leagues took up the most space followed by the war in China (see figure 4). The ‘Black Atlantic’ – predominantly consisting of articles on the Scottsboro case – would receive just as much attention as Indonesia. Hence, DAI and LAI prioritized their topics differently than ReV: while the Dutch East Indies had made up almost half of all articles in the previous journal, it now consisted of slightly more than one tenth of all articles. How can we explain this altered composition?

The prominence of the topics of China and Scottsboro in the new journals corresponded with the importance they were given within the Dutch and international Leagues. As the civil war in China had been one of the main issues of the LAI since its inception in 1927, the organization became especially concerned with the country after invasion of the province Manchuria by Japan in the fall of 1931.<sup>177</sup> Meanwhile, the Dutch section started organizing public events in the Netherlands on China. Coinciding with the

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<sup>176</sup> J. Louis Engdahl, ‘Scottsboro en de strijd tegen het imperialisme’, “*Liga*”, volume 1, number 2 (August 1932), 5-6 Engdahl was the secretary of the American LAI section and leader of the IAH campaign that supported the European tour of Ada Wright (see chapter V for Ada Wright at the WCIW).

<sup>177</sup> Petersson, *Willie Münzenberg*, II:857-858.

publications of DAI and “*Liga*”, the LAI-NL was reported to host two public rallies in Amsterdam and The Hague against the invasion of Manchuria which had been organized by its Chinese and Indonesian members.<sup>178</sup> Simultaneously, the international LAI had become a vehicle for the European part of the Scottsboro campaign.<sup>179</sup> This campaign – which was spearheaded by the communist organization *Internationale Arbeiter Hilfe* (“International Worker’s Relief”, IAH) – brought Ada Wright, the mother of two of the convicted Scottsboro Boys, to eight countries in Europe.<sup>180</sup> In the wake of this tour, a Dutch Scottsboro Committee was founded of which the LAI-NL became a member. Coincidentally or not, DAI and “*Liga*” were published at the exact time that Wright was making her tour through the Netherlands.<sup>181</sup>

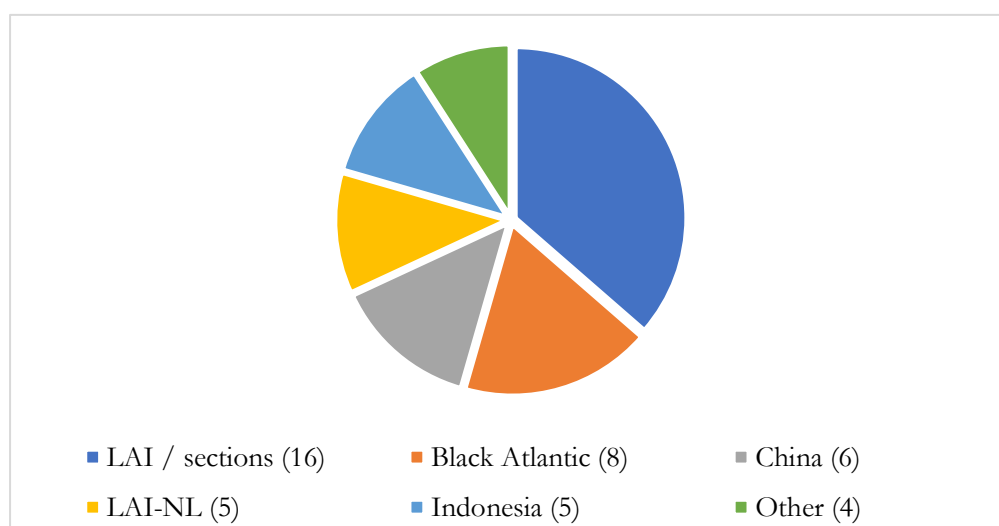


Figure 5. What topics did *De Anti-Imperialist* and “*Liga*” touch upon?

<sup>178</sup> RGASPI, 3/5/542/1/55, Report on the national sections of the League against Imperialism, Berlin, March 1932, 8.

<sup>179</sup> Petersson, *Willie Münzenberg*, II:858.

<sup>180</sup> Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, 16-65.

<sup>181</sup> Op ’t Ende, *Moord! Redt de jonge*, 19-29.

The relative marginalization of Indonesia within the LAI-NL journals, second, can be attributed to several reasons. Following from its mission statement, the LAI-NL did not seem to have perceived Indonesia, as its main issue and the journals of the Dutch section were published at a time that the Dutch West Indies did not witness any public anticolonial activity. After all, much of the public anticolonial resistance had been successfully crushed by the colonial government in 1927. Only later, tensions briefly flared up during the 1933 mutiny on the warship “*De Zeven Provinciën*”.<sup>182</sup> The diminished focus on Indonesia, however, can most logically be attributed to the strong lack in connections between anticolonial activists in the Netherlands and those in the Dutch East Indies. Just a few months before DAI and “*Liga*” were launched, the international secretariat of the League in Berlin would strongly lament the lack in information about Indonesia it received from the Dutch section.<sup>183</sup> Without any sources ‘on the ground’, therefore, writing articles based on recent information should have been considerably hard for the authors of DAI and “*Liga*”.

#### *Suriname and race: the role of Anton de Kom*

As an already marginalized topic in ReV, the issue of gender is completely excluded from the later journals of the LAI-NL. The previous silence on the Dutch West Indie, on the other hand, was partly broken. In an article on the hygienic situation in Suriname, DAI confronted presented statistics on ‘the causes of death of Surinamese children of farmers and workers’.<sup>184</sup> This specific article clearly deviated from the line of the international LAI and could point to the authorship of Anton de Kom. De Kom was known for working on the issue of hygiene in his mother country. He had sent the communist David Wijnkoop a letter asking him if he could table parliamentary questions about the issue.<sup>185</sup> This connection could be further supported by the fact that the house of De Kom – who lived in The Hague – was only one block away from the secretariat of the journals.<sup>186</sup> Additionally, by the time that both DAI and “*Liga*” were published, De Kom had already forged close ties with the LAI-NL.<sup>187</sup>

Compared to ReV, the issue of race also gained a slightly more prominent place, although exclusively in the articles on the Scottsboro trial. In one discussion of the African-American men, for example, the journal “*Liga*” states:

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<sup>182</sup> Stutje, *Behind the banner*, 225.

<sup>183</sup> RGASPI, 3/5/542/1/53, Report of the International Secretariat, Berlin, September 5, 1931, 13-14.

<sup>184</sup> ‘De treurige hygiënische toestanden in Suriname’, *De Anti-Imperialist*, volume 1, number 3 (April 1932), 3.

<sup>185</sup> IISH, ARCH01802/2/1/1171, Letter of Anton de Kom, The Hague, April 5, 1930.

<sup>186</sup> De Kom ends his letter to Wijnkoop with ‘H. Zwaardcroonstr. 108’ and the secretariat of both DAI and “*Liga*” was located at Hendrik Zwaardcroonstraat 114.

<sup>187</sup> Boots and Woortman, *Anton de Kom*, 98, 489.

“To understand the significance of this murder trial, one must first be reminded that these workers are *black*; and then suddenly the background of murder and lynching unfolds from which the drama of these eight negroes emerges. When one thinks that these men are *black*, one thinks of (...) the racial hatred generated by white rulers, one thinks of the terror, with which all coloured races are persecuted by foreign rulers.”<sup>188</sup>

Statements on race like the one above stood out in DAI and “*Liga*” for two reasons. First, it introduced a ‘race before class’ perspective by placing racial and not economic relations at the forefront of the Scottsboro case. Second, it made a connection between the latter issue and colonial issues in general. These two aspects suggest that De Kom either wrote the article or directly influenced its author, as he is known to be one of the activists in the Netherlands to have stressed the racist nature of the Scottsboro trial and its importance for understanding other colonial contexts.<sup>189</sup> This is not to say that DAI and “*Liga*” had exchanged the category of class for that of race. On the contrary, only a very small minority of the articles touched upon the issue of racism and these would mostly be limited to the Scottsboro case.<sup>190</sup> The Dutch colonies, including Suriname, would not be discussed in relation to race. Also on the topic of Scottsboro, other articles wielded a predominantly ‘class’ approach by stressing the working class background of the Afro-American men.<sup>191</sup> This is not surprising, since both DAI and “*Liga*” were written exclusively by communist authors whose ideological frame of reference – at least theoretically – tended to preclude the usage of ‘race’ above ‘class’. Like in the case of ReV, mentioning race was not impossible but it would predominantly be glossed over in favor of discussing class relations.

### *Size and impact*

What do both DAI and “*Liga*” tell us about the subscriptions and members of the LAI-NL? Nothing is known about the amount of subscribers these journals had, since they did not mention any exact numbers. In one case, the journal was reported to be sold 25 times at a LAI-NL meeting.<sup>192</sup> Subscriptions to “*Liga*” might have been higher because of its more

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<sup>188</sup> Emphasis in original. ‘Scottsboro’, “*Liga*”, volume 1, number 1 (May 1932), 5.

<sup>189</sup> Boots and Woortman, *Anton de Kom*, 96-98, 147-149, 166, 274, 308, 458; Op ’t Ende, ‘*Moord! Redt de jonge*, 37-42, 60.

<sup>190</sup> ‘Tegen de negenvoudige moord op de Scottsboro-boys!’, *De Anti-Imperialist*, volume 1, number 3 (April 1932), 1; ‘Over de Negers in Belgisch Congo’, *De Anti-Imperialist*, volume 1, number 3 (April 1932), 3-4; ‘Wat willen de negers?’, “*Liga*”, volume 1, number 2 (August 1932), 6-7.

<sup>191</sup> J. J. Louis Engdahl, ‘Scottsboro en de strijd tegen het imperialisme’, “*Liga*”, volume 1, number 2 (August 1932), 5-6.

<sup>192</sup> ‘*Liga*-vergadering te Amsterdam’, *De Tribune*, March 8, 1932, 6.

professional quality and the fact that it was announced by the communist newspaper *De Tribune*.<sup>193</sup> How many copies of this journal were sold, however, also remains unknown.

The journals above stated that the LAI-NL had departments in The Hague, Rotterdam, Amsterdam and Leiden followed by local departments in the province of Friesland.<sup>194</sup> It is unsure how many members were part of these departments although DAI and “*Liga*” mention 76 members being added to the Amsterdam department whereas the Rotterdam counted 185 members.<sup>195</sup> Compared to the total amount of members of Dutch communist parties, it becomes clear that the LAI-NL was supported by a only few percent of their constituents, since total membership of the CPH, OSP and RSP amounted to approximately 14,000 members.<sup>196</sup> Hence, the LAI-NL operated on the margins of the communist landscape of the Netherlands.

In the case of the Dutch colonies, the effect of the journals seems to have been almost non-existent. DAI and “*Liga*” faced the same language barrier of ReV, as both journals were still completely written in Dutch. Even if the LAI-NL had found the money to ship them to the colony they would not have arrived at their destination while similar publications like *The Anti-Imperialist Review* were closely monitored by the Dutch colonial authorities.<sup>197</sup> At the same time, the Dutch section had managed to ship its journals to Suriname. The newspaper *De Banier van Waarheid en Recht* stated that DAI was being distributed in the colony and that it had received “*Liga*”, after which it published the ‘mission statement’ and political programme of the journal.<sup>198</sup> How many issues of DAI and “*Liga*” actually circulated in Suriname or other parts of the Dutch Caribbean, however, is not known.

The most obvious sign that these later journals did not secure a position in the Dutch communist landscape were their financial problems. Both the organization and the journal did not manage to attract a sufficient amount of members and subscribers and the Dutch section wrote several times to the international secretariat in Berlin about the financial issues

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<sup>193</sup> “‘*Liga*’: Een eigen orgaan van de Liga tegen Imperialisme’, *De Tribune*, May 23, 1932, 8.

<sup>194</sup> ‘Nieuws van de organisatie’, “*Liga*”, volume 1, number 1 (May 1932), 4.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> De Jong, *Het Koninkrijk*, I:101.

<sup>197</sup> Poeze, *Politiek-politioneele overzichten*, III:111, 145.

<sup>198</sup> ‘Wist u?’, *De Banier van Waarheid en Recht*, April 15, 1932, 2; ‘Wat is de Liga?’, *De Banier van Waarheid en Recht*, September 28, 1932, 5.



with which it wrestled.<sup>199</sup> Once again, the media campaign of the LAI-NL had found itself in dire need of money and the section stopped publishing its journal after only five issues.<sup>200</sup>

## Conclusion

This chapter has looked into the press activity of the LAI-NL in between 1927 and 1932. The journal *Recht en Vrijheid* from 1927 and 1928 formulated an anticolonial vision aimed at both Indonesian struggle for independence and other anticolonial causes. In absolute numbers, the ReV's authors from various parts of global South would outnumber those from the West while the highest amount of articles were written by Dutch activists. Most of its articles touched on the Dutch East Indies while gender and the Dutch West Indies were (almost) absent. When mentioned, the issue of race was exclusively related to class.

I have argued that ReV initially presented itself as a 'heterodox platform' on which different leftist positions on anticolonial activism could be voiced. This function was eventually abandoned when the noncommunist members left the LAI-NL and ReV and their communist counterparts took control of both the organization and the journal. The split between these two groups indirectly caused the demise of ReV, while the sale of issues was no longer secured through the presence of the PI and members like P.J. Schmidt.

After three years of almost no press activity, the exclusively communist LAI-NL restarted its media campaign by launching the journals *De Anti-Imperialist* and "*Liga*". With only anonymously written articles, these journals largely focused on developments within the LAI and LAI-NL, China, Indonesia and the 'Black Atlantic'. New topics like Suriname and a 'race before class' perspective on the Scottsboro Boys trial emerged, pointing to the direct engagement of the anticolonial activist Anton de Kom. Faced again with financial shortages, however, the LAI again pulled the plug on its media campaign after five issues.

In the end, the three journals of the LAI-NL had to accept a position as minor outlets on the fringes of the Dutch leftist media landscape. Ultimately, the issues of the Dutch league did not reach the people in whose name it claimed to publish. Colonial censorship, language barriers, shipping costs and financial shortages were the reasons behind this lack, notwithstanding two cases of the later LAI-NL journals being mentioned in a Surinamese newspaper.

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<sup>199</sup> RGASPI, 3/5/542/1/56, Letter on the situation of the Dutch section to the international secretariat, The Hague, June 3, 1932.

<sup>200</sup> AR, 2.04.53.21, inventory number 19, Jaargang 1936. B. Linksche arbeiders-organisaties. Geheim., The Hague, March 28, 68.

## Chapter IV: Pushing for Suriname

### Anton de Kom and anticolonial initiatives (1927-1935)

The previous chapter has looked at the LAI-NL and its publications. In order to better understand how individual activists related to this organizations like the Dutch section, I take up the case of Anton de Kom. Effectively the only activist from Suriname to push for independence in the Netherlands for most of the interwar period, De Kom engaged with several anticolonial initiatives. In this chapter, I trace the interplay between Anton de Kom on the one hand and the PI, the LAI-NL and the AKTA campaign on the other. How was De Kom, if at all, effected by these organizations? And to what extent did he manage to ask attention for Suriname in these activist circles?

### De Kom and the PI (1927-1934)

The exchanges between Anton de Kom and Indonesian activists found their origin in 1927. In that year, according to a report by the security service of The Hague, Anton de Kom started to engage with members of the PI. Reportedly, De Kom met several times with Mohammad Hatta at the latter's home in The Hague where the two discussed colonial issues.<sup>201</sup> The crackdown on the Indonesian students in the Netherlands had been a catalyst for De Kom, who was said to have become interested in the anticolonial cause in the wake of the government's repression.<sup>202</sup> The actions by the Dutch state could also have led De Kom to keep a low profile for a while, as no other interactions with Indonesians from this period are documented. De Kom could also have chosen to simply stay away from public meetings and keep in touch with Indonesian activists on an individual and private basis.

De Kom and Hatta both appeared in public two years later on May 13, 1929 during a PI meeting in *Café Hollands* in The Hague. As this was a private meeting, De Kom might very well have been invited by someone of the PI, possibly Hatta. According to the Dutch secret service, around fifty PI members and De Kom came together to listen to a speech by Hadji August Salim and to debate with J.E. Stokvis, a prominent social democrat and former member of parliament of the Dutch East Indies (*de Volksraad*).<sup>203</sup> The meeting became a

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<sup>201</sup> The service states: 'In conversations about the nationalist movement, De Kom is soon inclined to speak up. He is rebellious by nature.' NL-HaNa, 2.10.36.51 Ministerie van Koloniën: Geheim Archief [periode 1901-1940], inventory number 331, July 1929 M15. Geheim afschrift inlichtingendienst Den Haag, document no. 1770, 2.

<sup>202</sup> The report states: 'Toen in 1926 een justitiële vervolging werd ingesteld tegen hier te lande vertoevende Indische studenten, de z.g. nationalisten, begon De Kom zich voor deze beweging te interesseren.' Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Bleekendaal, 'Het gekleurde front'.

deception for the latter, as Stokvis – priding himself on the fact that the SDAP had ‘always fought for the colonized’ – was increasingly scrutinized by the Indonesians and De Kom.<sup>204</sup> Hatta lamented the lack of resistance of the SDAP to the colonial oppression in the wake of the 1926 and 1927 uprisings. De Kom used his place on stage to ask ‘why Mr. van Kol [a prominent member and the colonial spokesmen of the SDAP] – when he claimed to have mercy on the oppressed races – had proposed to sell the Dutch West Indies to the United States?’<sup>205</sup> In an article in the newspaper *De Socialist* written after the meeting, Hatta noted that Stokvis did not react on De Kom’s question.<sup>206</sup>

After De Kom’s presence in *Café Hollands* in 1929, it would take until 1931 before De Kom was seen at another PI meeting. In between these years, the PI experienced the hostile takeover by its communist members and as a result, Hatta’s position within the organization dwindled.<sup>207</sup> This could have made it harder for De Kom to retain his ties with the Indonesians, as Hatta had possibly been the PI member he kept the most contact with. Meanwhile, De Kom had also found other ways to unfold his anticolonial politics, most notably through the journal *De Communistische Gids* which had made forging political ties with the PI less essential.<sup>208</sup> As soon as this journal was disbanded in 1930, however, De Kom lost his mouthpiece and might have started to look for other possible platforms.<sup>209</sup>

In December 1931, the PI organized a meeting in Amsterdam about the Japanese invasion of China which had started three months before.<sup>210</sup> The speakers were the PI members Roestam Effendi and Soedario Moewalladi together with the Chinese Tang Sian Gie and Anton de Kom. The former three criticized the Japanese invasion and its danger for the colonized peoples.<sup>211</sup> De Kom held a speech on Suriname. In it, he argued that the uprising that had taken place in the Surinamese capital Paramaribo – the so called *Hongeroproer* from October 1931 – demonstrated the ‘awakening of the twelfth province of the Netherlands.’<sup>212</sup> De Kom would also touch upon the issue of race, as he argued that in Suriname – like in the US in the case of the Scottsboro Boys – ‘racial hatred is artificially

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid. Scholars have unjustly taken this meeting to be the first time De Kom met Indonesian activists. Boots and Woortman, *Anton de Kom*, 58; Bleekendaal, ‘Het gekleurde front’, Stutje, *Behind the banner*, 224.

<sup>205</sup> NL-HaNa, 2.10.36.51, 331 M15, Geheim afschrift, 2; ‘Stokvis en de P.I. – Een rumoerige vergadering’, *De Indische Courant*, July 3, 1929, 13. ‘Perhimpoean Indonesia – De ervaringen van Stokvis’, *De Sumatra Post*, July 8, 1929, 5.

<sup>206</sup> Mohammad Hatta, ‘Nogmaals de lezing van J. E. Stokvis voor de “Perhimpoean Indonesia”’, *De Socialist*, June, 22, 1929; Poeze, *In het land van*, 219.

<sup>207</sup> Stutje, *Behind the banner*, 219.

<sup>208</sup> Boots and Woortman, *Anton de Kom*, 68.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid, 81.

<sup>210</sup> ‘De “Perhimpoean Indonesia” protesteert’, *Haagsche Courant*, December 22, 1931, 14.

<sup>211</sup> ‘Scheldkanonnade’, *Het Volk*, December 21, 1931, 9.

<sup>212</sup> Geestdriftige protestvergadering der Perhimpoean Indonesia’, *De Tribune*, December 22, 1931, 2.

produced'.<sup>213</sup> The meeting ended with the adoption of resolutions condemning the Japanese invasion, 'the terror in Suriname' and the 'unjust imprisonment of Chinese seamen in Suriname and their extradition to China'.<sup>214</sup> Meetings of this kind – with De Kom, the PI and the SPTI at the helm – would continue to be held in 1932, with De Kom continuously focusing on Suriname and the Scottsboro trial.<sup>215</sup>

Anton de Kom's presence at these PI events – and his subsequent clash with the colonial authorities in Suriname in 1933 – might have earned him a certain familiarity and respect within Indonesian anticolonial circles. This was demonstrated during the celebration of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the PI in The Hague in 1934. At this event, De Kom – together with other Indonesians and Chinese – was chosen as a board member of the congress.<sup>216</sup> In the speech that followed, De Kom made a new connection between himself and the Indonesian anticolonial activists. He did not talk about Scottsboro nor about the resistance in the Dutch East Indies but choose to situate the Indonesian independence struggle in the heart of Suriname. He did so by discussing the Surinamese-Javanese group in his country by stating that 'countless Indonesians are being exploited in Suriname and are fighting there together with the Surinamese proletarians against the Dutch blandas [Dutch people]'.<sup>217</sup>

The above paragraphs demonstrate that De Kom was allowed to participate in the public life of Indonesian activists from 1927 onwards. What role could the PI have played for De Kom? First of all, the PI offered him a political platform on which he could present his anticolonial agenda to the wider public. The organization was not very unique in this regard, however, as both the LAI-NL and the Dutch communists also offered him the chance to speak at public events. The Indonesians of the PI, secondly, publicly acknowledged the anticolonial 'status' of De Kom by appointing him on their anniversary committee in 1934. This could have been an important moment of recognition, as De Kom mostly felt the issue of Suriname to be neglected by Indonesian activists.<sup>218</sup> Most importantly, however, is the fact that the PI was at least partly instrumental in De Kom's politicization as an activist.

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> 'Protest-resoluties: Perhimpoean Indonesia spreekt zich uit', *De Locomotief*, December 26, 1931, 5.

<sup>215</sup> 'Protestvergadering van de Perhimpoean Indonesia tegen den Oorlog', *De Tribune*, February 13, 1932, 6; 'Protestbijeenkomst tegen het optreden van Japan', *De Indische Courant*, February 29, 1932, 5; 'Liga tegen Imperialisme Den Haag', *De Tribune*, March 19, 1932, 3.

<sup>216</sup> 'Maak ze onschadelijk', *De Volkskrant*, January 10, 1934, 1; 'Perhimpoean Indonesia in actie', *De Sumatra Post*, January 22, 1934, 5.

<sup>217</sup> 'De Perhimpoean Indonesia 25 jaar', *De Tribune*, January 9, 1934, 1; 'Maak ze onschadelijk', *De Volkskrant*, January 10, 1934, 1. The newspaper stated: 'Kam. De Kom herinnerde eraan, dat er talloze Indonesiers in Suriname uitgebuit worden en daar samen strijden met de Surinaamsche proleten tegen de Hollandsche blanda's. Spr. wekte op dezen strijd ten nauwste te verbinden met actie tegen de bourgeoisie in Holland zelf.'

<sup>218</sup> Tarisa and Hoogervorst, 'The screaming injustices', 37.



Image 12 and 13. *Anticolonial breeding ground*

Exterior and interior of *Café Hollandais* in The Hague, c. 1910.

At the start of his political career, when De Kom became interested in the anticolonial cause, the PI member Hatta proved to be a sparring partner and the possible key to meetings like those in *Café Hollands*, which was one of the very first events during which De Kom spoke ‘truth to imperial power’. The PI, then, can be regarded as the partial kickstart for De Kom’s later engagements with other political activities such as with the LAI-NL.

### De Kom and the (Dutch) LAI (1929-1932)

After De Kom became involved in Indonesian anticolonial circles, he started to sympathize with the international LAI. In a letter to the Dutch communist David Wijnkoop from April 1929, he asked the latter if the subject of Suriname and Curaçao could be put on the agenda of the Second World Congress in Frankfurt.<sup>219</sup> Afterwards, De Kom was present at a protest rally of the LAI-NL in August that same year and again in February 1930.<sup>220</sup> At around the same time that De Kom became engaged with the Dutch section, however, the organization was infiltrated by the secret service of The Hague and its chair Roestam Effendi found himself moving from address to address in an attempt to escape the eyes of the authorities.<sup>221</sup> During a meeting of the LAI-NL on February 15, 1930 Effendi warned fellow members of the LAI-NL that the police was withholding correspondence sent to and from him.<sup>222</sup> Three days later, he wrote that they should send their mail to a different address in The Hague than his own. He emphasized they should do so without mentioning any name.<sup>223</sup> This government crackdown might have been the reason that De Kom kept his head low as a LAI-NL member, only to emerge as an important actor within the Dutch section two years later. From then on, he started to chair its meetings in March 1932 and to act as one of its

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<sup>219</sup> The letter reads: ‘Ik wil ook bijvoegen in het bijschrift over uwe vertegenwoordiging op de Int. Liga, dat er de aandacht op Suriname en Curaçao zal worden gevestigd?’ IISH, ARCH01802/17/67, Letter from Anton de Kom to David Wijnkoop, April 29, 1929, Rotterdam.

<sup>220</sup> NL-HaNa, 2.09.22 Ministerie van Justitie geheim chronologisch archief oktober 1918 t/m december 1939, inventory number 16760. juli 1929, nrs. 1790 – 1985, monthly report of the Amsterdam intelligence, Overzicht no. 5, jaargang 1929, August, 17; NL-HaNa, 2.09.22, inventory number 16666. september 1929, Verslag van de openbare protestvergadering van de Liga, document number 21749, February 26, 1930, The Hague.

<sup>221</sup> The Dutch spy Joop van Soelingen infiltrated the departments of the LAI and CPH in The Hague. Rudi Harthoorn, *Vuile oorlog: De bestrijding van het communistisch verzet tijdens de Duitse bezetting* (Utrecht: Van Gruting, 2011), 59. Effendi would move from the Theresiastraat 210 (August 1929) to the Koningin Sophiestraat 12 (January 1930), Adelheidstraat 80 (February 1930) and eventually Carpentierstraat 87. He would move back to Adelheidstraat in June 1930, this time to number 48. IISH, ARCH01802/2, inventory number 82, Letter from Roestam Effendi, February 6, 1930, The Hague; ARCH01802/5, inventory number 104, Letter from Roestam Effendi, January 23, 1930, The Hague. ARCH01802/17, inventory number 67; Letter from the LAI-NL, February 22, 1930, The Hague.

<sup>222</sup> NL-HaNa, 2.09.22, 16666, Kort verslag van de huishoudelijke vergadering van het hoofdbestuur van de Liga, February 21, 1930, 4.

<sup>223</sup> ARCH01802/17, inventory number 66; Letter from Roestam Effendi, February 22, 1930, The Hague. The address of the LAI-NL secretariat would be Charlotte de Bourbonstraat 204.

representatives during the AKTA campaign in July and August (see down below). Eventually, he worked for the organization as main board member at the end of the same year.<sup>224</sup> De Kom's growing role within the LAI-NL did not have clear effects on its agenda, however, as the organization did not focus on the Dutch West Indies. The article on Suriname in "*Liga*", then, was the exception to the rule (see chapter III).

De Kom's activity in the LAI-NL begs the question why he did not engage with the international League. After all, he had expressed his sympathies for the organization towards the Dutch communist Wijnkoop, who attended its congresses, and had forged connections with Hatta, a prominent political figure in the League as one of its executive council members. At the time that the LAI was founded, however, De Kom was just starting to forge connections with Hatta and the former would only later get acquainted with Wijnkoop.<sup>225</sup> It could have been, then, that De Kom did not participate in the international League due to a lack of strong personal ties with members of the organization. This does not yet explain why De Kom remained outside of the international League after he had strengthened these connections later on. Another reason could be that De Kom did not want to attract any more unwanted attention from the authorities. After all, the members of the PI had been incarcerated because of their direct ties to the international League and the Dutch section suffered from police infiltration. The most probable reason, however, could be that De Kom did not regard the international League as a suited political platform for himself. Instead, he understood activism in the Netherlands to be the best way to advance his political agenda.<sup>226</sup> The (brief) surge in attention for Suriname in Dutch communist circles – especially after De Kom's clash with the colonial authorities in 1933 – might have served to strengthen De Kom in this belief. Before that year, however, another initiative – called the AKTA – already placed Suriname on its anticolonial agenda.

### The AKTA campaign (1932)

In the beginning of 1932, the municipality of The Hague decided to get the Dutch pavilion of the *Exposition Coloniale Internationale* (International Colonial Exhibition, ICE) from Paris to

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<sup>224</sup> NL-HaNa, 2.09.22, inventory number 16773, nrs. 1200 – 1425, Verslag van de openbare protestvergadering van de Liga afdeling Den Haag, March 29, 1932; NL-HaNa, 2.10.36.51, inventory number 386, December 1932 S24. Brief van de chef van de Centrale Inlichtingendienst, December, 21, 1932, The Hague.

<sup>225</sup> Boots and Woortman, *Anton de Kom*, 68.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid, 235.

the Netherlands.<sup>227</sup> The result was the *Indische Tentoonstelling* (Indies Exhibition, IT), an imperial exhibition situated in the central Westerbroekpark in The Hague and running from May 15 to September 30, 1932. The IT was conceived to present the colonial splendor from both sides of Dutch empire to its audience. Although its most spectacular exhibits consisted of buildings in a Javanese architectural style, the Dutch West Indies were represented as well. Parts of the exposition included, for example, Surinamese newspapers, a panorama of Curaçao, ‘tropical’ fruits and a lecture on Suriname.<sup>228</sup>

Anticolonial activists in the Netherlands soon picked up on the IT. Inspired by a similar campaign in Paris Dutch anarchists teamed up with the communist organizations PI, SPTI and LAI-NL.<sup>229</sup> The resulting *Anti-Koloniale Tentoonstellings Aktie* (‘Anticolonial Exhibition Campaign’, AKTA) was a small organization: its committee only consisted of fourteen members.<sup>230</sup> Five member of this committee were from the Dutch colonies. Soedario Moewalladi, representing the PI, became the 1<sup>st</sup> secretary of the committee while Tang represented the SPTI. Anton de Kom and Mustafa represented the LAI-NL whereas the PI member Utojo became part of AKTA’s press committee.<sup>231</sup> The ultimate aim of AKTA was to organize a large protest rally in close proximity to the IT. This event was to be preceded by ‘neighborhood meetings’ during which speeches would be accompanied by lightshows displaying colonial horrors.<sup>232</sup>

#### *Anton de Kom and the AKTA*

What role did De Kom play within the AKTA campaign? He represented the LAI-NL in the committee and in that capacity, he attended the meetings of the committee and became

<sup>227</sup> ‘Den Haag krijgt toch zijn Indische Tentoonstelling’, *Het Vaderland: staat- en letterkundig nieuwsblad*, January 1, 1932, 1. For the Dutch pavilion at the ICE see Marieke Bloembergen, *Koloniale vertoningen: de verbeelding van Nederlands-Indië op de wereldtentoonstellingen (1880-1931)* (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 2002), 274-276.

<sup>228</sup> ‘West-Indië’, *Amigoe di Curaçao: weekblad voor de Curacaosche eilanden*, August 13, 1932, 5; ‘De Indische tentoonstelling’, *Leeuwarder nieuwsblad: goedkoop advertentieblad* August 13, 1932, 8; ‘Anderhalve eeuw journalistiek in Suriname’, *Haagsche courant*, September 12, 1932, 16; C.L. Tomson, *West-Indië – Brochure betr. de inzending van Surinaamse citrusvruchten op de Indische Tentoonstelling in het Westbroekpark te 's-Gravenhage* (The Hague: publisher unknown, 1932).

<sup>229</sup> On the French campaign see Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis*, 103-105; Petersson, *Willie Münzenberg*, II:786-791. The French exhibition was supposed to culminate into a permanent International Anti-Imperialist Museum in Berlin. Ibid, 778; Poeze, *Politiek-Politieele Overzichten*, III:35-36. The international League send letters to the Dutch East Indies, asking for any anticolonial material that could be included in the exhibition. ‘Oproep van de Liga tegen Imperialisme’, *Het Nieuws van de Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, February 24, 1931, 1.

<sup>230</sup>

<sup>231</sup> IISH, ARCH00234, ‘AKTA Adressen comité leden’; ‘Adressen aangesloten organisaties’.

<sup>232</sup> IISH, ARCH00234, Letter to newspapers, July 5, 1932, The Hague; Letter to partner organizations, July 23, 1932, The Hague; IISH, ARCH00662 – Archive Internationale Anti-Militaristische Vereeniging, inventory number 280 Circulaires. 1932., ‘Jongeren en de Indische Tentoonstelling’. IISH, ARCH00234, Letter to the NSV, June 30, 1932, The Hague; Letter to partner organizations, July 14, 1932, The Hague; Letter to partner organizations, July 23, 1932, The Hague;



responsible for enlisting members.<sup>233</sup> One document suggests that De Kom was expected to garner more support than other activists from AKTA because he – together with the Dutch communist J. Brengel – received the most lists with which to enroll future subscribers.<sup>234</sup> De Kom also spoke publicly on the issue of the IT during public rallies of the LAI-NL, PI and SPTI. He used the occasion of the colonial exhibition to voice his support for the ‘Surinamese proletariat’ and the Scottsboro Boys. In one case, he also clearly expressed his support for Indonesian independence.<sup>235</sup>

More importantly than advocating for it, De Kom influenced the anticolonial agenda of the AKTA. The Dutch AKTA member and anarchist Gé Nabrink, for example, published the brochure *Bloedt, Kromo, Bloedt!* in which he contrasted the imperial splendor of the IT with the grim colonial realities in the Dutch colonies.<sup>236</sup> Calling the exhibition ‘a lie and deceit, tinsel and pretense’, Nabrink closed his pamphlet by calling for ‘the liberation of the Dutch colonies of Suriname, Curaçao and Indonesia.’<sup>237</sup> It has been suggested that De Kom directly influenced Nabrink’s pamphlet.<sup>238</sup> A concept manifesto of the AKTA also included Suriname and the Dutch Caribbean in its opening lines:

People of the Netherlands! Everyone is calling out to you: visit the colonial exhibition! What will they show you there? The "benefits" that the Dutch authorities have brought to these distant countries: it is after all the *Dutch* East Indies and *Dutch* West Indies! <sup>239</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> IISH, ARCH00234, ‘Presentielijst Gecomb. Best. Verg. Comité AKTA’, September 24, 1932, The Hague.

<sup>234</sup> IISH, ARCH00234, Uitgegeven steunlijsten A.K.T.A., July, The Hague. It not sure if and how much De Kom campaigned for the AKTA, however, as the anarchist members complained that they were doing almost all of the work. IISH, ARCH00234, Letter to partner organizations, July 14, 1932, The Hague.

<sup>235</sup> ‘Uit Den Haag’, *De Vrije Socialist*, June 11, 1932, 3; ‘Protest tegen de tentoonstelling’, *Het Volk*, June 6, 1932, 7; ‘Uit Leiden’, *De Tribune*, June 10, 1932, 2. The original text from this speech reads: ‘Kam. A. De Kom (Suriname) krijgt vervolgens het woord. Fel hekelt hij de Nederlandsche overheersching die het gelukt is het Indische volk in bedwang te houden. Doch eens zal het de gekleurde volkeren gelukken, met de hulp der blanke arbeiders, de Nederlandsche bourgeoisie naar de hel te jagen.’ ‘Wij en de koloniale tentoonstelling’, *De Tribune*, June 7, 1932, 2.

<sup>236</sup> Gé Nabrink, *Bloedt, Kromo, Bloedt! – De schaamteloze pralerij van de Nederlandsche bezitters en de taak van de arbeiders* (Krommenie: Brochure Depot IAMV, 1932), 2, 7, 15.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>238</sup> Part of Nabrink’s pamphlet discusses the African Black Brotherhood (ABB) – an anticolonial organization from New York. Kuijt suggests that information on the ABB reached Nabrink through De Kom’s connections with Otto Huiswoud, who was a member of ABB. If De Kom and Huiswoud already entertained relations with one another in 1932, however is not known. Kuijt, ‘Exposing the Colonial’.

<sup>239</sup> Emphasis in original. The Dutch text reads: ‘Volk van Nederland! Allereen roept men u toe: bezoekt de koloniale tentoonstelling! Wat zal men u daar toonen? De "weldaden" die het Nederlandsche gezag aan deze verre landen gebracht heeft: het is toch Nederlandsch *Oost* Indië en Nederlandsch *West* Indië!’ IISH, ARCH00234, Concept for the general AKTA manifesto by ‘the affiliated organisations’, 1932, The Hague.



Image 14. *Defacing an exhibition*

Back cover of the AKTA pamphlet by Gé Nabrink. The caption reads: 'What the colonial exhibition does not show us!' Besides the Indonesian man a Dutch guilder is placed.

In addition to statements like these, the AKTA organizers aimed to contact anticolonial organizations and press in both the Dutch West and East Indies as it kept lists of people that resided in these colonies.<sup>240</sup> In one particular instance, AKTA managed to get the AKTA's youth manifesto printed in the Surinamese newspaper *De Banier van Recht en Waarheid*.<sup>241</sup> It could have been that AKTA's youth manifesto reached Suriname because of the relations De Kom entertained with the press in the colony.<sup>242</sup>

Ultimately, the AKTA campaign was a failure as it did not manage to organize the large rally it had set as its ultimate goal.<sup>243</sup> Only two of the many 'neighborhood meetings' envisioned by the AKTA took place which were attended by not more than a dozen visitors.<sup>244</sup> These aspects point to a general disinterest of the Dutch public for the campaign. Organized by activists that operated on the fringes of the political landscape, AKTA was probably an inviting environment for visitors of the IT, on whom the 'deceiving' character of the exhibition was evidently lost. This lack in interest must have been a deception for the AKTA members, as they had claimed to have 'intensely' campaigned by handing out 'tens of thousands' of manifestos, especially in schools in The Hague.<sup>245</sup> At the end of September 1932, AKTA held its last meeting. During the event, which was attended by six people including De Kom and Tang, it was decided that the AKTA was to be officially disbanded.<sup>246</sup>

How can we assess the relation between De Kom and the AKTA? On the one hand, the campaign offered him a political position within anticolonial circles as committee member and LAI representative. Because of this role, De Kom did probably push for the issue of Suriname and the Dutch Caribbean to be put on the agenda of the initiative. The active focus on these parts of Dutch empire must have been welcomed by De Kom because leftist press attention for Surinamese anticolonialism was low in 1932, especially within other

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<sup>240</sup> These lists consisted of people across the Indonesian archipelago (Sulawesi, Timor, Ambon, Java) as well as Caribbean press like *De Banier van Waarheid en Recht*, *Amigoe di Curaçao*, *Het Volksblad*, *De West* and *De Surinamer*. IISH, ARCH00234, Algemeene Adressen Organisaties.

<sup>241</sup> 'De Indische Tentoonstelling te Den Haag; *De Banier van Waarheid en Recht*, August 17, 1932, 5-6. Just a week before, *De Banier van Waarheid en Recht* reported that it had received the manifesto – amongst other anticolonial publications – but deemed it 'undesirable to distribute the text of the these pieces through this organ.' 'Communisme?', *De Banier van Waarheid en Recht*, August 10, 1932, 5.

<sup>242</sup> Boots and Woortman, *Anton de Kom*, 78, 106.

<sup>243</sup> If a rally of AKTA had taken place in August, the leftist press would have certainly picked up on it. Articles on AKTA activity in August, however, are plainly absent. It is hence safe to assume that the protest rally of AKTA did not take place.

<sup>244</sup> IISH, ARCH00234, Letter to newspapers, July 5, 1932, The Hague; Letter to partner organizations, July 23, 1932, The Hague; IISH, ARCH00662 – Archive Internationale Anti-Militaristische Vereeniging, inventory number 280 Circulaires. 1932., 'Jongeren en de Indische Tentoonstelling'.

<sup>245</sup> IISH, ARCH00234, Letter to the NSV, June 30, 1932, The Hague; Letter to partner organizations, July 14, 1932, The Hague. A receipt by a publication agency in The Hague mentions 30,000 manifestos. IISH, ARCH00234, Receipt from Electrische Drukker A. Sas, July 16, 1932, The Hague.

<sup>246</sup> IISH, ARCH00234, 'Presentielijst Gecomb. Best. Verg. Comité AKTA', September 24, 1932, The Hague.

anticolonial press like the later journals of the LAI-NL (see chapter III).<sup>247</sup> For the AKTA, De Kom might also have been a valuable member as his (possible) connections with the press in Suriname could bring their publications across the Atlantic. At the very same time, however, the AKTA did might have constituted a bitter disillusionment for De Kom, as it demonstrated the general disinterest of the Dutch public for the anticolonial cause. Three months after AKTA was abandoned, De Kom would travel back to Suriname – with the main aim of visiting his sick mother – where he would clash with the colonial authorities and be subsequently imprisoned.

#### De Kom and the end of the LAI-NL (1933-1935)

The near simultaneity of the mutiny on the Dutch warship “De Zeven Provinciën” in Indonesia and the incarceration of Anton de Kom in Suriname in February 1933 caused a ‘double momentum’ for the Dutch West and East Indies in communist circles. The newspaper *De Tribune*, for example, put both issues on its front page with the title ‘The resistance of the colonial peoples!’<sup>248</sup> In addition, the LAI-NL sent a pamphlet to its members, saying that ‘Our comrades in Surabaya, on the *Zeven Provinciën*, in the West Indies – where our main board member [Anton de Kom] is incarcerated – expect our support in their revolutionary struggle!’<sup>249</sup> The LAI-NL also organized public events which also touched upon Suriname. On February 13, the Dutch League section organized a public rally on the situation in the Dutch colonies. The event attracted considerable clout as the Dutch secret service reported that approximately a thousand people attended.<sup>250</sup> The speakers at the event were the Indonesian Fredrik Pandean and the Dutch communists G.J. van Munster, Jef Last, Louis de Visser and Elizabeth Menagé-Challa. The speeches were held in a hallway decorated with banners that said ‘Hands off the Mutineers!’ and ‘Hands off De Kom!’<sup>251</sup>

Communist press attention for De Kom and Suriname continued throughout 1933 and eventually reached its peak when De Kom – after three months of unlawful detention –

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<sup>247</sup> The communist newspaper *De Tribune* was the only media outlet that covered the activities of De Kom. The majority of these articles, however, only concerned announcements for public events.

<sup>248</sup> ‘Het verzet der koloniale volkeren!’, *De Tribune*, February 18, 1.

<sup>249</sup> AR, 2.10.36.051, min. van Kolonien geheim verbaal archief 1918 t/m 1940, inventory number 406, [Circulaire Liga tegen Imperialisme en voor Nationale Onafhankelijkheid.]. Document number 550. February 15, 1933, The Hague.

<sup>250</sup> AR, 2.10.36.051, inventory number 391, [Vergadering Liga tegen Imperialisme en Koloniale Onderdrukking.]. Document number 819 and 2258. February 21, 1933, The Hague. ‘Liga tegen Imperialisme’, *De Banier van Waarheid en Recht*, April 1, 1933, 6.

<sup>251</sup> AR, 2.10.36.051, 391, 5.

was released and brought back to the Netherlands on May 27, 1933.<sup>252</sup> It was in this context that De Kom started to push further for the topic of Suriname within and outside the LAI-NL. A month after his release, the Dutch League section published a manifesto together with the collective *Links Richten* of which De Kom was also a member.<sup>253</sup> It exclusively covered De Kom's period in Suriname and advertised for his future book *Wij Slaven van Suriname*.<sup>254</sup> Later on in 1933, De Kom would make use of other LAI-NL public events to advertise for his book.<sup>255</sup>

The LAI-NL not only touched upon the issue of Suriname but also presented De Kom with an environment in which he could meet other Surinamese. In 1934, De Kom chaired meetings of the LAI-NL during which other (Afro-)Surinamese (Desiré van der Lak, Julian Breeveld), Hindustani Surinamese (August Sunkar) and Afro-American (Jack Taylor) members were present. Of these members, Julian Breeveld also functioned as board member of the League's department in The Hague.<sup>256</sup> It is unknown whether De Kom enlisted these people or to what extent they were actively engaged.<sup>257</sup> Looking at De Kom's prolific campaigning for Suriname at the time, however, it could well have been that he saw conscripting fellow Surinamese as a way to garner more support for and representation of Suriname in the Dutch League.

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<sup>252</sup> Boots and Woortman, *Anton de Kom*, 147; 'Kameraad A. de Kom vertelt!', *De Tribune*, May 27, 1933, 1.

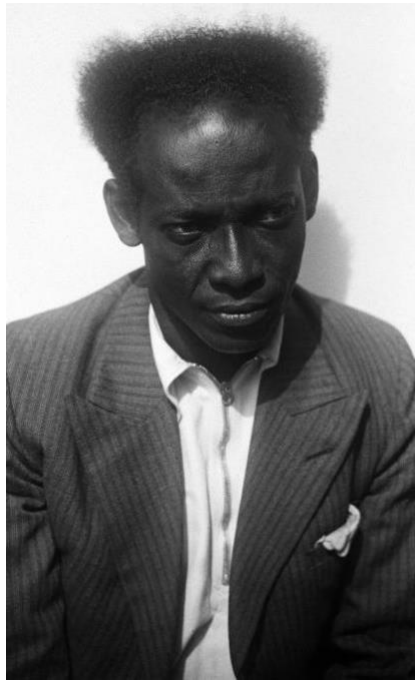
<sup>253</sup> *Links Richten* also published a 'Negro issue' which contained a part of De Kom's book later book. 'Onze Helden', *Negernummer*, volume 1, number 9 (May 1933), 1-3.

<sup>254</sup> The LAI-NL also published a standalone article, translated from English, in which the

<sup>255</sup> Boots and Woortman, *Anton de Kom*, 162, 167.

<sup>256</sup> NL-HaNa, 2.10.18 Archief van de Gouverneur van Suriname: Afdeling Kabinet Geheim, 1885-1951 (1952), inventory number 58, Ingekomen inlichtingen over activiteiten van personen, verdacht van socialistische of communistische sympathieën, Report on a meeting of the Dutch League in The Hague, document number 7673 and 8357, January 30, February 21, 1934, The Hague. NL-HaNa, 2.10.18, 58, Letter to the Paramaribo police, document number 7673, January 30, 1934, The Hague. See also Oostindie, *In het land van*, 70, 124.

<sup>257</sup> For some biographical information on these members see Annemarie Cottaar, *Ik had een neef in Den Haag: Nieuwkomers in de twintigste eeuw* (The Hague: Waanders, 1997), 115; Rudie Kagie, *De eerste neger* (Amsterdam: Mets & Schilt, 2006), 84-85, 184; Boots and Woortman, *Anton de Kom*, 501.



Images 15 and 16. *Anticolonial activists*

Portraits of Anton de Kom, 1933 and Roestam Effendi, c. 1937.

### *The fall of the LAI-NL*

While the LAI-NL started focusing on Suriname, however, the organization was on the verge of collapse. One reason behind this crisis was financial in nature. Already in February 1933, when De Kom had clashed with the colonial authorities in Suriname, the Dutch intelligence service issued a report on a meeting of the Dutch section in Amsterdam. During this meeting, the board of the organization unanimously agreed that the LAI-NL 'lay flat'.<sup>258</sup> Reportedly, LAI-NL officials had stopped collecting money from its members which had led the flow of money to run dry. As a matter of fact, the Dutch section had already been unable to publish the manifesto on the munity in the Dutch East Indies and the incarceration of De Kom by itself. The communist party CPH had taken care of the publication and was invited to pay for the upcoming events of the LAI-NL as well.<sup>259</sup>

A second reason for the crisis of the LAI-NL was police infiltration. A year after the 'financial' meeting of the Dutch section in 1933, the board came together in The Hague in the beginning of 1934. De Kom chaired the meeting and the other Surinamese members mentioned above were present, together with the secretary Roestam Effendi.<sup>260</sup> The members decided that Roestam Effendi would remain responsible for the political course of the organization and that from then on, no Indonesian would have a seat on the League's board 'on the basis of increased police activity, both here and in the [Dutch East] Indies'.<sup>261</sup> A month after the meeting, Effendi gave the departments of the Dutch League new instructions. These guidelines prohibited the departments of the LAI-NL to keep lists with the names of their members, in a bid to prevent any further reporting to the authorities.<sup>262</sup>

A third issue that the LAI-NL faced was its strictly Indonesian focus. This became clear during a meeting between Reginald Bridgeman and Effendi in Amsterdam in the summer of 1934. Bridgeman – who had become the new leading figure of the international League after its headquarters had moved to London – made a tour through Europe to take stock of the activities of the national sections. From the 29<sup>th</sup> to the 30<sup>th</sup> of June, Bridgeman visited the Dutch capital where he would be acquainted with Effendi. The former reported:

'I had a long conversation with him [Effendi]. He seems to have the anti-imperialist movement very much at heart and is undoubtedly its leading figure in Holland. The headquarters of the Dutch Section

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<sup>258</sup> AR, 2.10.36.051, inventory number 406, [Liga tegen Imperialisme en voor Nationale Onafhankelijkheid.], document number 611, February 13, 1933, The Hague.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

<sup>260</sup> NL-HaNa, 2.10.18., 58.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

<sup>262</sup> AR, 2.04.53.21 collectie De Meijer, inventory number 19, Jaargang 1936. B. Linksche arbeiders-organisaties. Geheim., March 28, 1935, The Hague, 67-69.

are no longer at The Hague but at Amsterdam. There are in addition to the Amsterdam Section, which has a membership of about 400, sections of the League at the Hague (150 members), Rotterdam (150-200 members) Haarlem, Leiden, Delft, Groningen, Friesland, Tijn – a total membership of about 900. (...) I gathered that (...) the League had become mainly an organization of colonials [people from the colonies], and Roestam Effendi admitted that their only contacts are with Indonesians. He promised to give attention to the development of contacts with Surinam.<sup>263</sup>

Bridgeman's report proves that the topic of Suriname remained marginalized within the LAI-NL and that the 1933 'momentum' of De Kom and the new Surinamese members in the Dutch section did not bring about a shift towards Suriname. Moreover, the meeting between Bridgeman and Effendi seems to suggest that the Surinamese members of LAI-NL had left because 'the only contacts' of the Dutch section would be 'with Indonesians'. If De Kom and the other members had left out of discontent with the LAI-NL's agenda or whether Effendi would give attention to Suriname after his meeting with Bridgeman, is not known.

Soon after Effendi had met Bridgeman, the Dutch section collapsed. A reason for this statement is the silence in both the communist press and security service reports on the LAI-NL from 1935 onwards. Apart from a small article that mentions the Amsterdam department joining a protest against the statue of the colonial governor J.B. van Heutsz, newspapers like *De Tribune* stopped mentioning the organization.<sup>264</sup> In the annual reports on 'leftist labour organizations' of the Dutch secret service from late 1930s, the Dutch section is not mentioned once.<sup>265</sup> De Kom made his last appearance for the LAI-NL on April 10, 1935. Attending the funeral of the Indonesian Ticalu Pandean, a member of the Dutch section since 1927, De Kom declared: 'We, who remain, will keep fighting for the complete freedom of Indonesia and Suriname.'<sup>266</sup>

How can we understand the relation between De Kom and the LAI-NL? For one, the Dutch section brought Suriname to the fore in its publications or during its events, especially after the 1933 'momentum' of De Kom's incarceration. Secondly, the LAI-NL was an activist environment where De Kom could meet fellow Surinamese members or where he could possibly enlist them for the anticolonial cause. Most importantly, the organization constituted a form of organization, one in which he could both interact with fellow Dutch,

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<sup>263</sup> RGASPI, 3/5/542/1/61, Reginald Bridgeman, Report of the international secretariat for 1934, 4-5.

<sup>264</sup> 'Fascistische ontboezemingen', *De Tribune*, June 25, 1935, 8.

<sup>265</sup> AR, 2.04.53.21 collectie De Meijer, inventory number 19, Jaargang 1936. B. Linksche arbeiders-organisaties. Geheim., March 28, 1935, The Hague; 2.13.70 Generale Staf (Algemeen Hoofdkwartier), 1914-1940, inventory number 1579 Jaargang 1937. B. Linksche arbeiders-organisaties. Geheim., March 23, 1937, The Hague.

<sup>266</sup> 'Indiërs in Nederland – De invloed van extreme elementen', *De Indische Courant*, May 10, 1935, 8.



Indonesian and Surinamese activists and gain a political position. After all, De Kom made name for himself and Suriname while moving from a sympathizer of the League to eventually one of its main board members. Hence, the LAI-NL was a place of upwards social mobility for De Kom, at least within the small anticolonial circles of the Netherlands. At the same time, however, this 'promotion' did not go hand in hand with an increase in political influence. Despite a small rise in Surinamese members in the beginning of 1934, the political control over the LAI-NL remained in the hands of Roestam Effendi and its focus was closely kept on the Dutch East Indies.

### Conclusion

The above chapter has studied the interplay between the activist Anton de Kom and anticolonial initiatives in the interwar Netherlands. The organization PI, first, can be understood as the kickstart of De Kom's politicization as an activist. Having gained an interest in the anticolonial cause through the persecution of the PI, De Kom found a sparring partner in the person of Mohammad Hatta. It has possibly been through Hatta that De Kom was invited to a closed meeting of the PI, during which he could 'speak truth to imperial power'. This dynamic continued throughout the 1930s, as the PI organized events where De Kom could unfold his anticolonial agenda. Eventually, the PI can also be seen as an organization that judged De Kom – at least in one instance – on his merits. The organization honored De Kom by appointing him on the board of their anniversary meeting, thereby recognizing his engagements. This was a rare moment, especially since organizations like the PI did include De Kom in their events but did usually not refer to him or Suriname.

The AKTA, second, offered a fruitful platform for the activism of De Kom. As a LAI-NL representative, De Kom probably enlisted members while he held speeches on the *Indische Tentoonstelling* on several occasions. Although it is not exactly sure to what extent De Kom directly influenced the AKTA, the campaign clearly focused on both Suriname and Curaçao in its publications. The AKTA also managed to reach out to Suriname – possibly through the connections of De Kom – by sending one of its manifestos to a Surinamese newspaper. At the same time, AKTA proved to be a bitter disillusionment because it failed to organize a large protest rally, which the campaign had set as its ultimate goal. If anything, the AKTA reaffirmed the isolated position of the anticolonial activists in the Netherlands. The visitors of the *Indische Tentoonstelling* were simply not interested in or familiar with the ideas propagated by a small activist group that operated on the fringes of society.

The LAI-NL, thirdly, was the only political organization in the Netherlands of which De Kom is known to have been a member. De Kom's relation with the Dutch section was ambiguous. On the one hand, the organization devoted attention to Suriname in its publications and during events while it also allowed for the inclusion of other Surinamese members. The LAI-NL enabled a certain social mobility for De Kom as within the organization he moved up to become one of its main board members. The structure of the LAI-NL, on the other hand, was weak due to financial problems and police infiltration. Most importantly, De Kom's growing political position within the Dutch League was not accompanied with an increase in his political influence. The meeting between Reginald Bridgeman and Roestam Effendi in 1934 demonstrates that the agenda of the LAI-NL remained exclusively fixed on the Dutch East Indies. To De Kom, who had been associating himself with the organization for over four years, this fact must have been nothing less than a disappointment and it could have been the reason why he left the organization before it collapsed in 1935.

Chapter V: An Amsterdam moment  
The World Congress against Imperialist War (1932)

The previous two chapters have focused on the interactions between Dutch, Indonesian and Surinamese activists. To complement this image with activists from the global South, I look into the *World Congress against Imperialist War*. I do so by focusing on this event on an institutional level and on an individual level. How did the WCIW differ from earlier congresses of the LAI? Which activists from the global South spoke at this congress and how did they negotiate their anticolonial ideals with the antiwar agenda of the WCIW?

From the 27<sup>th</sup> to the 29<sup>th</sup> of August 1932, the *Wereldstrijdcongres tegen den Imperialistischen Oorlog* (World Congress against Imperialist War, WCIW) took place in the RAI conference center in Amsterdam. According to the organizers, nearly 2,200 delegates from 27 countries, represented by 830 communists, 293 social democrats and 34 other socialists gathered in the Dutch capital.<sup>267</sup> Attendants from Germany, France and the Netherlands made up the lion's share of the delegates, amounting to a total of 1,802.<sup>268</sup> In terms of gender, only 58 female participants – almost exclusively from Europe – were present while several 'women conferences' were organized alongside the WCIW.<sup>269</sup> In terms of 'class', the WCIW was visited by 1,865 workers, 249 'intellectuals' and 72 farmers.<sup>270</sup> It also hosted some of the prominent cultural and political individuals of the era, as French novelists and pacifists Romain Rolland and Henri Barbusse had personally asked them to attend.<sup>271</sup>

The primary aim of the WCIW was to discuss the political state of the world, adopt a manifesto and establish a permanent anti-war bureau.<sup>272</sup> High on the agenda stood the conflicts caused by imperialist powers that could lead to a new world war, most notably the 1931 Japanese invasion of the Chinese province Manchuria.<sup>273</sup> Although the congress was

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<sup>267</sup> Of these participants, 682 belonged to communist and 412 to noncommunist labour unions. 'De samenstelling van het congres', *De Tribune*, August 31, 1932, 5; Davies, *NGOs: A new history*, 114-115.

<sup>268</sup> The German group was the largest (759 attendants) followed by the French (585) and the Dutch (458). RGASPI, 3/5/543/1/19, Information on the international anti-war congress, 'Zusammensetzung des Kongresses'; Petersson, *Willi Münzenberg*, II:916.

<sup>269</sup> 'De samenstelling van het congres', *De Tribune*, August 31, 1932, 5.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid. Petersson, *Willi Münzenberg*, II:916. AR, 2.09.22, inventory number 16785, Jaargang 1932. Overzicht no. 6. Geheim., 11.

<sup>271</sup> Some of the most notable invited individuals included Albert Einstein (USA), Heinrich Mann (Germany), Upton Sinclair (USA), General Sandino (Latin America), Sen Katayama (Japan), Soong Ching-ling (China) and Maxim Gorky (Russia). Einstein, Rolland, Gorki and Sandino did not or were not allowed to attend the congress. RGASPI 3/5/543/1/19, 'Weltbekannte Teilnehmer des Amsterdamer Antikriegskongresses', *General-Anzeiger für Dortmund und das gesamte rheinisch-westfälische Industriegebiet*, August 26, 1932, 1.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid, 22; Petersson, *Willi Münzenberg*, II:911.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid, 913.

presented as an event supported by the whole leftist spectrum – the organizers repeatedly stressed that a large share of social democrats and other noncommunist groups were attending – the WCIW had a strong communist imprint. In fact, the actual organization of the WCIW lay with the West European Bureau (WEB) of the Comintern, which had its seat in Berlin.<sup>274</sup> As such, the conference especially served the purpose of preparing the hearts and minds in Europe for ‘defending’ the Soviet Union, which feared encirclement and a possible attack by either Japan or Germany.<sup>275</sup>

### The LAI(-NL) and the WCIW

What was the relation between the LAI and the WCIW? The congress, first, functioned as a cover for an *interne Konferenz* (‘closed conference’) of the international LAI while most national sections of the League were present in Amsterdam.<sup>276</sup> This ‘conference inside a conference’ addressed the activities of the League in the US, UK, Ireland, Spain and Palestine. However, there was not enough time to discuss all pressing matters and the situation in countries the Netherlands, Indonesia and India remained untouched.<sup>277</sup> More importantly, the LAI had by now found itself in an ‘ideological and organizational deadlock’ while the communist parties of Europe had turned their back to the organization and its national sections had difficulties with continuing their work.<sup>278</sup> Resultingly, ‘Amsterdam’ signaled the last time that the LAI ever organized an international congress after the two previous ones in Brussels and Frankfurt.<sup>279</sup>

Simultaneously, the WCIW marked the beginning of the end of the anticolonial agenda of the LAI while a new role had been thought out for the organization. The Comintern aimed to integrate the anti-imperial and anti-war agendas with one another at the WCIW. It imagined the LAI as an instrument to install – through its connections with the global South – anti-war committees in colonial and semi-colonial territories, thereby securing support for the antiwar (and pro-Soviet) cause outside of Europe.<sup>280</sup> Many ‘veterans’ of the LAI which had been part of the organization since its inception – such as Willie Münzenberg,

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<sup>274</sup> Ibid, 914; AR 2.09.22/16785, 23.

<sup>275</sup> Petersson, *Willi Münzenberg*, II:913.

<sup>276</sup> RGASPI 3/5/543/1, inventory number 18, Material on the congress against Imperialist War, ‘Interne Konferenz der Vertreter der Ligasektionen’, *Informationsbulletin der Liga gegen Imperialismus*, volume 6, issue 22 (October 1932), 4-5.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid.

<sup>278</sup> Petersson, *Willi Münzenberg*, II:913.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid, 919.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid, 917-918.

Romain Rolland, Henri Barbusse, Louis Gibarti and Sen Katayama – prominently figured during the events of the WCIW.<sup>281</sup>

The fact that both the Netherlands and Indonesia remained undiscussed during the LAI's closed conference might have been a disappointment for the Dutch section. The Amsterdam department of the LAI-NL decided to house the Dutch preparatory committee of the congress and one of its members, the communist Simon Neter, would lead the committee. Later on, Neter would write a report – which would fall in the hands of the Dutch secret service – that evaluated the congress.<sup>282</sup> In his report, Neter mentions that organizing the WCIW had cost the preparatory committee more than 2000 guilders and he urges Münzenberg to pay this amount back quickly.<sup>283</sup> Despite this setback, the LAI-NL apparently saw the WCIW as a suited event to promote its own activities as it claimed to plan 'massive' gatherings in several Dutch cities directly after the congress.<sup>284</sup> These events most probably did not materialize, however, as no documentation exists on them.

It seems highly unlikely that the WCIW resonated beyond communist circles in Dutch society. The SDAP had boycotted the congress, although one of its prominent members Floor Wibaut was reportedly present at one of its meetings.<sup>285</sup> Dutch anti-militarists, anarchists and other leftists also opposed the event by protesting and handing out leaflets in front of the RAI conference center.<sup>286</sup> A broad Dutch antiwar 'front' – probably cherished by the Dutch communists – was thus nipped in the bud before the WCIW had started. After the congress, some Dutch attendants became disappointed as well. Henriette Roland Holst – former LAI-NL member and prominent contributor to *ReV* – had decided to join the Dutch delegation, which consisted of the communist members of parliament (David Wijnkoop, Louis de Visser, Kees Schalker and Roestam Effendi) and eleven members of the PI.<sup>287</sup> Soon after the WCIW, however, Holst distanced herself from the congress by writing a brochure, in which she stated that 'the Comintern commits the terrible crime of cashing in on one of the most horrible things possible, an impending world war!'<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>281</sup> Louro, *Comrades against Imperialism*, 220. For all the LAI participants of the WCIW see RGASPI 3/5/543/1/19, 'Wer nimmt teil am Kampfkongress gegen den Imperialistischen Krieg? Liste Nummer. 3', 1932, 13-14.

<sup>282</sup> AR, 2.21.244/113, 2.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid, 7-9.

<sup>284</sup> "Lga", volume 1, issue 2 (August 1932), 1, 8.

<sup>285</sup> 'Het Wereldcongres tegen den Imperialistischen Oorlog', *De Arbeid: weekblad van het Nationaal Arbeidssecretariaat in Nederland*, volume 26, number 36 (September 3, 1932), 3.

<sup>286</sup> Albarda de Jong, 'Het Wereldcongres tegen den Imperialistischen Oorlog', *De Syndicalist*, volume 10, number 482 (September 17, 1932), 2-3; number 483 (September 14, 1932), 2; number 484 (October 1, 1932), 2; 'Het congres applaudisseert', *Het Volk*, August 29, 1932, 2.

<sup>287</sup> RGASPI 3/5/543/1/19, 'Wer nimmt teil', 13.

<sup>288</sup> 'De Nederlandsche Anti-Oorlogsbeweging en de "Vredes"-politiek der 3<sup>de</sup> Internationale', *Vredes Pers Bureau: orgaan ten dienste van de vredesbeweging in Nederland*, number 194 (October 28, 1932), 1.

*Three groups of activists*

To what extent did anticolonial activist from the global South form a part of the WCIW? One can roughly distinguish between three groups. The first consisted of members of the WCIW's international anti-war committee that was announced before the congress took place.<sup>289</sup> The committee counted members from India (Valahbhai Patel, Rata Singh and Saklatvala), China (Soong Ching-ling and Kojen), Turkey (Ferdi and Karim Said), Algeria (Chabila), Nicaragua (Augustino Sandino), sub-Sahara Africa (Kuyata), the US (Gardener) and Indonesia (Asis, pseudonym of PI member Achmed Soebardjo).<sup>290</sup> Of these members, Soong Ching-ling and Katayama had already occupied a prominent position within LAI.<sup>291</sup>

The second group from the global South consisted of activists that gave *acte de présence* at the WCIW, partly consisting of members from the international anti-war committee. With its eleven members, the Indonesian group was the largest. It counted the PI members Roestam Effendi, Achmed Soebardjo, Rachiem and Maluy among its ranks, with the latter two names probably being pseudonyms.<sup>292</sup> Both the PI and Roestam Effendi are mentioned as two separate 'individuals' of the Dutch delegation, making it impossible to find out which other PI members attended the congress.<sup>293</sup> In addition, the Indonesians were accompanied by Anton de Kom.<sup>294</sup> A Chinese delegation consisted of eight people of whom the names Deng, Ra and Kojen are known.<sup>295</sup> Smaller groups consisted of other activists from Asia. They came from India (Vallabhbai Patel, Rata Singh and Saklatvala), Japan (Katayama, Mido and two unnamed participants) and Korea (anonymous).<sup>296</sup> Lastly, the WCIW saw two African-American delegates, Ada Wright and a man named Gardener.<sup>297</sup>

A third and significantly smaller group consisted of the anticolonial activists that held a speech during the WCIW. They hailed from India (Patel, Singh), China (Deng, Ra and an unnamed man), Indonesia (Soebardjo, Rachiem, Maluy), the US (Wright, Gardener) and

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<sup>289</sup> RGASPI 3/5/543/1/19, 'Fortsetzung der Sitzung', Kongressbulletin Nr. 1, 2.

<sup>290</sup> AR 2.09.22/16785, 37. For a detailed description of these and other members see AR, 2.21.244, inventory number 113, [Wereldcongres tegen oorlog], August 16, 1932, The Hague, document number 32568, 7-10.

<sup>291</sup> Louro et al, *The League against Imperialism*, 24, 19, 24, 42, 195, 247. Soong Ching-ling became chair of the preparatory anti-war committee in China. IISH, ARCH01661 – World Congress against the Imperialist War Collection, inventory number 2, Tatsachen, Material zur Frage der Gefahr des imperialistischen Krieges und seiner Bekämpfung, Berlin, 1932, 10-11.

<sup>292</sup> RGASPI 3/5/543/1/19, 'Wer nimmt teil', 6.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid.

<sup>294</sup> IISH, ARCH01661, inventory number 14, Press clippings. July-September 1932. 'De meeting der tienduizend', *Post-editie* (August 31, 1932).

<sup>295</sup> AR 2.09.22/16785, 37; AR, 2.21.244, 113.

<sup>296</sup> RGASPI 3/5/543/1/19, 'Zusammensetzung des Kongresses'. Saklatvala was part of the British delegation.

<sup>297</sup> IISH, ARCH01661, 28, 'De zitting van zaterdag', *Post-editie* (August 30, 1932).

Suriname (Anton de Kom).<sup>298</sup> In another instance, a Korean, a Chinese and a Japanese man spoke together on stage in the name of the Asian League against Imperialism.<sup>299</sup>

*'Amsterdam' versus 'Brussels' and 'Frankfurt'*

The three groups of activists presented above paint a picture of the presence of the global South at the WCIW. This categorization, however, does not touch on the extent to which the WCIW was significant for international anticolonialism. In order to assess the anti-imperial character at the WCIW, a comparison with the previous two 'world congresses' of the LAI in Frankfurt (1927) and Brussels (1929) could yield relevant insights. After all, these three cities were the only ones to have witnessed the international League coming together on a larger scale than its more regular Executive Committee meetings. Thus, theoretically, 'Brussels', 'Frankfurt' and 'Amsterdam' constituted three consecutive moments of its history of international congresses. What picture arises from a comparison between these events?

First, the WCIW saw considerably less participants from the global South than the first two world congresses, amounting to a total of 29 delegates.<sup>300</sup> Would one add the people who were appointed on its international antiwar committee – but who did not visit the congress – the number rises slightly to 36. This number amounts to half of the 71 delegates from the global South that attended the first world congress in Brussels.<sup>301</sup> The amount is relatively low when keeping in mind the total amount of people – 2,200 delegates – that attended the WCIW. In comparison, 174 and 263 delegates were present in total at the congresses in Brussels and Frankfurt respectively.<sup>302</sup> One reason behind this 'underrepresentation' of the global South could have been the nefarious state of the LAI itself. In 1932, the organization struggled with financial shortages combined with a lack of support from the national communist parties in Europe.<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> For the sailor Deng see 'Een internationaal oorlogscongres gekozen', *De Tribune*, August 30, 1932, 9; Albarda de Jong, 'Het wereldcongres tegen den Imperialistischen Oorlog', *De Syndicalist*, volume 10, number 482 (September 17, 1932), 3. For the speech by Ra see RGASPI 3/5/543/1/19, 'Résumé des Congrès', Paris, 1932, 4. For the speech by Maluy on the Sunda Island. Ibid, 6.

<sup>299</sup> RGASPI 3/5/543/1/19, 'Fortsetzung der Sitzung', Kongressbulletin Nr. 9, 5.

<sup>300</sup> I derive this number from the amount of activists mentioned in the documentation on the congress. This relatively low amount reportedly led one British delegate of the WCIW to remark that there were 'few colonials' (people from the colonies) in Amsterdam. Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, 75.

<sup>301</sup> Stutje, *Behind the banner*, 116.

<sup>302</sup> Louro et al, *The League against Imperialism*, 17; Stutje, *Behind the banner*, 214.

<sup>303</sup> Petersson, *Willi Münzenberg*, II:913.

Image 17. Ada Wright giving a speech during the first day of the WCIW.



Image 18. Henriette Roland Holst in conversation at the World Congress against Imperialist War.

Image 19. David Wijnkoop and Sen Katayama chat over coffee or tea at the WCIW.





Additionally, the WCIW— especially in contrast to the first congress in Brussels — was predominantly a communist event and hence might have been a less inviting event for noncommunist activists from the global South to attend.

A second aspect was the fact that most of the activists from the global South present in Amsterdam already resided in or travelled through Europe. Ada Wright, for example, was in the middle of the Dutch Scottsboro campaign whereas politicians like the Indian Vallabhbhai Patel had been in England shortly before the WCIW.<sup>304</sup> A number of other activists were also reported to hail from a European country.<sup>305</sup> Additionally, the congress was exclusively endorsed by non-Western organizations that had their headquarters in Europe (e.g. the Perhimpunan Indonesia in Leiden and the Anti-Imperialist League of Chinese in Europe in Berlin).<sup>306</sup> This could suggest that political ties between the LAI and activists from the colonies were either deteriorating or simply lacked. However, the fact that anticolonial activists did not travel to the WCIW can just as much be attributed to restrictions from European governments. As a matter of fact, the Swiss government had refused to host the WCIW in Geneva, the city initially planned for the congress.<sup>307</sup> While the Dutch government did grant the WCIW the right to take place in Amsterdam, it forbid any delegation that needed a visa to enter the country to attend the congress, including the Russian one.<sup>308</sup> Hence the LAI and the organizers behind WCIW might have become wary of any further travel bans — they were a known issue within the international LAI — and could have decided not to invite anticolonial activists from outside Europe.<sup>309</sup>

A third aspect is the relatively limited political role that anticolonial activists were allowed to play within the WCIW. While it is true that the international anti-war committee contained a substantial amount of people from the global South, this committee wielded no actual power and more than half of its members probably did not (manage to) attend the congress, as accounts of the WCIW remain silent on their participation.<sup>310</sup> Simultaneously, the international bureau of the anti-war committee — the organization that decided over the proceedings and publications of the WCIW — did not contain any members from outside of

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<sup>304</sup> Op 't Ende, *Moord! Redt de jonge*, 19-32, RGASPI 3/5/543/1/18, Telegram from Reginald Bridgeman, London, August 24, 1932.

<sup>305</sup> RGASPI 3/5/543/1/19, 'Fortsetzung der Sitzung', Kongressbulletin Nr. 9, 3.

<sup>306</sup> IISH, ARCH01661/2, 9.

<sup>307</sup> Petersson, *Willi Münzenberg*, II:910.

<sup>308</sup> It is not exactly sure why the Dutch government decided to implement this measure. For reactions in the communist press see 'Ruys Regeering weigert Russische delegatie toegang tot Nederland', *De Tribune*, August 23, 1932, 1; 'Hernieuwde weigering tot toelating van Maxim Gorki', *De Tribune*, August 24, 1932, 1.

<sup>309</sup> Daniel Bruckenhau, 'British Passport Restrictions, the League Against Imperialism, and the Problem of Liberal Democracy', Louro et al, eds., *The League against Imperialism*, 187-210.

<sup>310</sup> Petersson, *Willi Münzenberg*, II:916.

Europe except for the Japanese communist Sen Katayama, who was a member of the Executive Committee of the Comintern (ECCI).<sup>311</sup> The WCIW also differs from the previous two world congresses in this regard. Both ‘Brussels’ and, to a lesser extent, ‘Frankfurt’ offered activists from the global South – including a substantial amount of noncommunist participants – the chance to exert considerable influence over the congress including in its most influential body, the executive council.<sup>312</sup>

The three aspects above point to the fact that the WCIW was less significant for international anticolonialism than the two previous world congresses of the LAI had been. People from the global South did not figure prominently at the event nor did they occupy key political positions. This aspect starkly contrasted with the original aim of the WCIW to secure support for the antiwar agenda in the global South through anti-war committees in colonial territories. This is not to say, however, that the activists from the global South who attended the WCIW are historically irrelevant. As representatives of anticolonial activism from the interwar period, they found themselves amidst a political environment that was moving towards an antiwar agenda. Looking at their speeches can yield insight in how these activists negotiated their anticolonial ideals with a new antiwar agenda. To do so, I will now briefly touch upon some individual speakers at the WCIW and the contents of their speeches.

### War and colonialism: speeches by anticolonial activists

#### *Activists from the Dutch colonies*

As mentioned above, the activists from the Dutch colonies that attended were members from the PI and Anton de Kom, although members of the SPTI might have also been present.<sup>313</sup> According to the secret service of the Dutch Indies, Roestam Effendi was rather optimistic about the WCIW, as he remarked that ‘it left room for large expansion.’<sup>314</sup> It is not sure what Effendi meant by this and if it came about at all.

Two Indonesians are reported to have spoken at the WCIW. On behalf of the PI, Achmad Soebardjo spoke under the pseudonym of Asis. Before his speech, the Dutch communists David Wijnkoop and Louis de Visser took position on both sides of the stage

<sup>311</sup> RGASPI 3/5/543/1/19, ‘Le Comité du Mondial de lutte contre la guerre impérialiste’, Paris, 1932, 3.

<sup>312</sup> Louro, *Comrades against Imperialism*, 19; Stutje, *Behind the banner*, 118.

<sup>313</sup> As a communist organization primarily concerned with China, the SPTI did fit both the ideological backdrop of the WCIW and its thematic focus. It could have been that the organization formed a part of either the Indonesian or Chinese delegations but remained anonymous to not attract any attention from the authorities.

<sup>314</sup> The Dutch East Indies secret service reported: ‘in plaats daarvan nam de P.I. toen deel aan het (...) Wereldstrijdcongres (...) waar de P.I. volgens Roestam Effendi op haar plaats was omdat het ruimte liet voor grooiteren uitbouw.’ Poeze, *Politiek-politioneele overzichten*, III:228.

to shout “Indonesia free from Holland, now, now, now!”<sup>315</sup> Afterwards, Soebardjo claimed that he was

‘a nameless representative of 60 million enslaved peoples of Indonesia and among them 2500 exiles on the Upper Digul [the prison camp *Boven Digoei*]. The anti-war congress (...) is also a matter of the colonized peoples. (...) We are not against every war, we will convert the imperialist war into the liberation war of our people against its oppressors!’<sup>316</sup>

Another Indonesian named Rachiem held a speech – reportedly in German – in which he analyzed how Indonesia was a target of all imperialist powers in the world. Rachiem stated:

‘For Indonesia, the danger of war is always exceedingly great, because of the geographic location of the archipelago and because of the enormous oil wealth, which all the imperialist powers are targeting. The Dutch government is building a third cruiser and despite the financial possibilities, it spends large sums of money on the air fleet. (...) We will show that not the race struggle, but the class struggle will soon speak the decisive word.’<sup>317</sup>

The Indonesian speakers were accompanied by De Kom. Sources briefly mention that he touched upon the ‘oppressed masses in Suriname’ and the ‘liberation’ of the Scottsboro Boys.<sup>318</sup> These topics were in line with speeches that De Kom held during previous antiwar events in the Netherlands. At the *Volkscongres tegen Loonroof en Oorlog* (‘People’s Congress against Wage Theft and War’) of March 1932 – where members of the SPTI and PI spoke as well – De Kom touched upon both Suriname and the Scottsboro Boys. Lamenting the ‘racial hatred’ that was ‘superficially created’ in the United States, De Kom argued that the nine African-American boys ‘have to die because they are working class children and because they are black.’<sup>319</sup>

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<sup>315</sup> Poeze, *In het land van*, 251-252, Stutje, *Behind the banner*, 229. A third Indonesian speaker was Maluy but the contents of his speeches are unknown. RGASPI 3/5/543/1/19, ‘Résumé des Congrès’, Paris, 1932, 6.

<sup>316</sup> IISH, ARCH01661, inventory number 14, Press clippings. July-September 1932. ‘De meeting der tienduizend’, *Post-editie* (August 31, 1932).

<sup>317</sup> IISH, ARCH01661, inventory number 28, *De Tribune*, Amsterdam, Nos. 210-212, 214-216, 218, 221, etc.. August-September 1932, ‘De zitting van zondagmiddag’, *Post-editie* (September 1, 1932), 2. It could very well be that this name was a pseudonym and that the speaker – keeping in mind that he spoke German – actually was Setiadjit Soegondo, a communist PI member who worked for more than a year for the international League in Berlin. Stutje, *Behind the banner*, 193.

<sup>318</sup> IISH, ARCH01661, inventory number 14, Press clippings. July-September 1932. ‘De meeting der tienduizend’, *Post-editie* (August 31, 1932).

<sup>319</sup> AR, 2.09.22, inventory number 16773, Verslag van het Volkscongres tegen Loonroof en Oorlog, gehouden op Zaterdag 26 en Zondag 27 Maart 1932, in het NV-huis te Utrecht., April 4, 1932, The Hague, document number 30437, 10-111. De Kom also attended an ‘anti-war’ day in the Dutch town of Tiel around the time of the WCIW. ‘Onze oorlogsdag uitstekend geslaagd!’, *De Tribune*, August 24, 1932, 2.

It is hard to assess the impact and actions of the Indonesians and De Kom at the congress, as their interactions with other anticolonial activists from the global South remain unrecorded and may have been plainly absent. In any case, their speeches clearly differed from one another. On the one hand, the Indonesian activists adopted the anti-war rhetoric by translating it to an Indonesian context and comparing Dutch colonialism to a war-like situation. They did so in largely militant terms – calling for a ‘liberation war’ – and in the case of Rachiem by stressing a class element. De Kom, on the other hand, did not formulate his remarks in anti-war terms. Rather, he would continue to spearhead his two main issues of Suriname and the Scottsboro Boys while emphasizing the idea of race in the latter case, as he had (probably) done in his article in “*Liga*” that came out around the time that WCIW was held. De Kom, who was known as a staunch opponent of violence, was probably reluctant in joining any calls for a ‘liberation war’ and thus seems to not have changed his rhetoric at the WCIW.<sup>320</sup>

#### *Sen Katayama*

One of the more prominent Asian speakers at the WCIW was the Japanese Sen Katayama. His appearance can be explained by his well-established position in the circuits of the Comintern and the LAI. For a substantial amount of time, Katayama had been a member of the Executive Committee of the Comintern (ECCI), the most authoritative body in the Soviet ‘solar system’.<sup>321</sup> After reminiscing on his first time in Amsterdam – he attended a congress against the Russo-Japanese war held in the Dutch capital in 1905 – Katayama praised the Soviet Union government for ‘pursuing a policy of peace, despite all the provocations on the part of the Japanese imperialism.’<sup>322</sup> He continued:

‘Comrades, the world war is approaching. Nay, it has already begun. (...) The attack on the Soviet Union was supposed to begin (...). And finally, the peace policy of the Soviet Union was successful in warding off the attack. But only for the moment. (...) We must declare a revolutionary war against the imperialist war. (...) I stand here once more (...) to call upon this congress to struggle against imperialism. (...) Long live the Anti-War Congress!’<sup>323</sup>

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<sup>320</sup> Boots and Woortman, *Anton de Kom*, 127.

<sup>321</sup> Weiss, *International Communism*, 145, 153, 156, 205, 233; Louro et al, *The League against Imperialism*, 23, 24, 350.

<sup>322</sup> IISH, ARCH01661, inventory number 3, Speeches at the Congress by Sen Katayama and Valablay Patel, ‘Speech of Sen Katayama’, 1-3.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid. See also Albarda de Jong, ‘Het Wereldcongres tegen den Imperialistischen Oorlog’, *De Syndicalist*, volume 10, number 482 (September 17, 1932), 2-3 and RGASPI 3/5/543/1/18, ‘Abendsitzung vom 27.8 – Die Rede Sen Katayamas’, Kongressbulletin Nr. 6, 1-2.

It becomes clear that Kayama's contribution was markedly different than those from other speakers. First, he was one of the very few activists from the global South to predominantly call for the support of the Soviet Union. This is not surprising, given the prominent position that Katayama occupied within the establishment of the Comintern. The Japanese nationality of Katayama and his long record within the communist circles, second, had to stress the relevance of the WCIW's agenda. As someone who was said to have criticized Japan for decades – the nation against which the congress was aimed – Katayama's appearance symbolized the goal that was expected to be achieved by the WCIW on a collective level. Thirdly, Katayama was both a member of the international bureau of the anti-war committee and of the LAI and hence represented a direct link between the two. In his speeches, however, he did not refer to other anticolonial activists or struggles in the colonies. His contribution could signify that also in the higher 'circles' of the international League, reaching out to anticolonial activists from the global South was not seen as a high priority, which stood in contrast to what the Comintern desired of the 'new' LAI.<sup>324</sup>

#### *Ada Wright*

One of the two African-American attendants of the WCIW – the only woman of colour to speak at the congress – was Ada Wright, the mother of two of the Scottsboro Boys. As mentioned before, the Scottsboro trial consisted of nine young African American men who had been sentenced to death because of allegations of rape.<sup>325</sup> Wright had been the pivotal figure in a global communist campaign against this trial during which she visited sixteen countries in Europe.<sup>326</sup> When she attended the WCIW in Amsterdam, Wright had spent months in the Netherlands travelling the country, sometimes in the company of Anton de Kom.<sup>327</sup> Having greeted the congress 'in the name of the Black proletariat', Wright stated:

'this vast assembly strongly protests against American justice and its repeated ambushes to create divisions and racial prejudices between the exploited from America. She [Wright] advocates for the idea of taking up the struggle against the imperialist war, which is far more important than the lives of her children.'<sup>328</sup>

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<sup>324</sup> Petersson, *Willi Münzenberg*, II:920.

<sup>325</sup> *De Tribune*, August 27, 1932, 5; August 30, 1932, 9.

<sup>326</sup> Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, 5–6, 23–24, 27–28, 30–31, 37–40.

<sup>327</sup> For Ada Wright and Dutch Scottsboro campaign see Op 't Ende, *'Moord! Redt de jonge*, 19–32. This account omits Wright's presence at the WCIW but Pennybacker briefly touches upon it. Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, 38, 75.

<sup>328</sup> IISH, ARCH01661, 28, 'De zitting van zaterdag', *Post-editie* (August 30, 1932); RGASPI 3/5/543/1/19, Kongressbulletin Nr. 5, 2.

Image 20. Henri Barbusse during his opening speech at the WCIW.



Image 21. Patel in conversation with Irish delegate Charlotte Despar.

Taken from her speech, Wright was the only delegate in Amsterdam to explicitly refer to race. Like De Kom elsewhere, she did so in relation to the Scottsboro Boys trial. It could have been that both De Kom and Wright understood this case to relate more to race than the connections made by other activists to their agendas.<sup>329</sup> At the same time, Wright did not mention gender in her appearance although the case itself would be about the rape of two women and her gender role as mother of the boys would be consistently emphasized.<sup>330</sup> After her speech, the international committee of the WCIW passed a resolution on ‘the liberation’ of the Scottsboro Boys and sent a telegram to the embassy of the United States.<sup>331</sup> Another African-American man called Gardener also gave a speech in which he remarked to ‘represent the worst exploited, despised and reviled people in America.’<sup>332</sup>

One aspect of the speeches of both Wright and Gardener is that neither of the two formulated their struggle in antiwar terms. Instead, Wright did not perceive the issue of antiwar to be connected to her own campaign as she strictly kept the two issues separated, possibly also downplaying her own cause in the face of the antiwar agenda (‘more important than the lives of her children’). Both Wright and Gardener were probably well aware of constituting a small minority at the congress. Together with De Kom, they were the only Black individuals to speak at the WCIW. Supposedly, Wright and Gardener saw their contribution to the congress to be a symbolic appearance for all Black people because they both explicitly referred to their role as representatives.

#### *Vallabhbhai Patel*

One of the few noncommunist activists from the global South to attend the WCIW was the Indian politician Vallabhbhai Patel (1875-1950), senior leader and member of the nationalist party Indian National Congress (INC). He was most probably invited by Reginald Bridgeman – the leading figure of the British League section – who had sent a telegram from London to the Dutch organizing committee, asking its members to ‘reserve two rooms for his [Patel’s] party.’<sup>333</sup> At the congress, Patel was chosen into the permanent international anti-war committee after which he took the stage.<sup>334</sup>

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<sup>329</sup> Op ‘t Ende, *Moord! Redt de jonge*, 42.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid, 46-47. Pennyback does also exclude the idea of gender in her account on Wright.

<sup>331</sup> RGASPI 3/5/543/1/19, ‘Résumé des Congrès’, Paris, 1932, 4.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid, 6; IISH, ARCH01661, 28, ‘De zitting van zondagmiddag’, *Post-editie* (September 1, 1932).

<sup>333</sup> RGASPI 3/5/543/1/18, Telegram from Reginald Bridgeman, London, August 24, 1932.

<sup>334</sup> RGASPI 3/5/543/1/19, ‘Interview mit Valabhay Patel’, Beilage zum Kongressbulletin 1, 4; IISH, ARCH01661, inventory number 10, Kongress-Bulletin, Nos. 1-5, 7 (p. 4), 8. ‘Interview mit Valabhay Patel’, Beilage zum Kongressbulletin 1, 4.

In his speech, Patel praised Mahatma Gandhi as ‘champion of nonviolence and anti-war’ and argued that imperialism and war were intimately connected. Like Katayama, Patel stated that a world war had already broken out in Asia, only this time in India:

‘India is the country where a real war is going on, where people are shot every day by the machine guns of the British troops and by the bombs of British airplanes. (...) The All-India National Congress only exists illegally, the press is suppressed, the censorship is rampant. The truth about India should not reach the world.’<sup>335</sup>

After giving a short survey of French, Japanese and Italian imperialism, Patel made a connection between India and the rest of the world through British imperialism:

‘Rule over India means rule over Egypt, Arabia, Persia, Afghanistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Tibet and South China. (...) It is the British Empire that forces Great Britain to be constantly ready for imperialist war. (...) The colonial interests exacerbate the imperialist danger of war and the armaments against the Soviet Union.’<sup>336</sup>

Patel then ended his speech with a call for independence:

‘I am steeped in the conviction that there can be no peace in the world until India and the other oppressed peoples are liberated. All talk of disarmament and never again war is pointless as long as millions are oppressed by imperialism.’<sup>337</sup>

In the wake of his speech, Patel would face severe backlash from other congress members. Willi Münzenberg, for example, ran counter against Patel by arguing that the non-violence propagated by Gandhi amounted to a meaningless suicide: ‘he [Patel] would sacrifice himself by catching the bullet but we want the Indians to live!’<sup>338</sup> Another speaker from India, the communist Rattan Singh, called Patel a ‘traitor’ who ‘with his bullocks about nonviolence only diverts attention away from the real resistance of the Indian working class.’<sup>339</sup> Ultimately, the international LAI would publish a manifesto after the WCIW in which it claimed that

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<sup>335</sup> IISH, ARCH01661/3, ‘Rede von Vallabhai Patel’, August 28, 1932, 1.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid, 1-2.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>338</sup> Albarda de Jong, ‘Het wereldcongres tegen den Imperialistischen Oorlog’, *De Syndicalist*, volume 10, number 483 (September 24, 1932), 2.

<sup>339</sup> IISH, ARCH01661, 28, *Post-editie* (September 1, 1932), 2.



‘the All-India National Congress [of which Patel was the senior leader], the most important organization of the bourgeoisie, gives practical aid to British imperialism by preventing the development of revolutionary mass struggles.’<sup>340</sup>

Despite the fierce criticism of his position, Patel held another speech near the end of the congress. In it, he openly criticized the WCIW manifesto as it did not stress the independence of India as a vital condition for world peace.<sup>341</sup> Reportedly, Patel also demanded the struggle of ‘national minorities’ to be included in the manifest. The text that he proposed was eventually adopted.<sup>342</sup> In the end, the adopted manifesto of the WCIW briefly mentioned colonialism and India in one paragraph, although it is unknown whether Patel was directly instrumental in its formulation:

‘We see that colonial war, waged over subjugated countries and plundered resources, is raging incessantly on all continents. That whole peoples and immense countries, such as India, Morocco, Nicaragua, are really waging war against the armed forces of the imperialist touts (*sjacheraars*).’<sup>343</sup>

The case of Patel stands out because he negotiated the anticolonial with the antiwar agenda differently than other activists from the global South. The Indonesian anticolonial activists formulated their struggle in antiwar terms, Katayama subsumed anticolonialism under the antiwar rubric and activists like De Kom, Wright and Garner kept the two issues apart. Patel, on the other hand, saw anticolonial activism as necessary to eradicate the very conditions on which ‘imperialist war’ would supposedly take place. Patel therefore placed abolishing empire before any possible antiwar effort. This standpoint was not unique, since a larger group of Indian and British activists, like Jawaharlal Nehru and Reginald Bridgeman, started to see colonialism as the root cause of war in the early 1930s.<sup>344</sup>

At the same time, Patel alluded to the official doctrine of the WCIW – which stipulated ‘the defense of the Soviet Union’ – by arguing that anticolonialism would be in favor of the security of the latter. This makes the attacks on Patel all the more remarkable since in principle he seemed to agree with the WCIW’s organizers on the importance of ‘defending’ the Soviet Union. Hence, the antagonism between Patel and the other attendants

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<sup>340</sup> IISH, ARCH01661, inventory number 32, Informationsbulletin der Liga gegen Imperialismus, Nos. 18, 22, Juli, October 1932, ‘Zum Amsterdamer Kongress – Manifest des Internationalen Sekretariats der Liga gegen Imperialismus’, *Informationsbulletin der Liga gegen Imperialismus*, number 22 (October 1932), 2-3.

<sup>341</sup> Albarda de Jong, ‘Het wereldcongres tegen den Imperialistischen Oorlog’, *De Syndicalist*, volume 10, number 483 (September 24, 1932), 2.

<sup>342</sup> RGASPI 3/5/543/1/19, ‘Résumé des Congrès’, Paris, 1932, 6.

<sup>343</sup> ‘Manifest van het Amsterdamsche congres tegen den oorlog’, *Post-Editie*, September 6, 1932, 2-3.

<sup>344</sup> Louro, *Comrades against Imperialism*, 218-221.

seems to have been less caused by a disagreement on the idea behind the congress and more by ideological hairsplitting. After all, Patel was foremostly attacked because of his membership of the 'reformist' and noncommunist INC or because of his praise of nonviolence and Gandhi, a move perceived to be not 'radical' or 'revolutionary' enough.

Thus, at least in the case of Patel, the WCIW was a sectarian environment for noncommunist anticolonial activists wishing to advocate for their own cause. Although Patel was able to hold speeches, be a member of an international committee of the WCIW and reportedly influence its manifesto, his political maneuvering space was limited. Opposed by the communist attendants, which made up the lion's share of the congress, it seems unlikely that his actions attracted a great following.

## Conclusion

This chapter has looked into the *World Congress against Imperialist War* in two ways. On an institutional level, the WCIW signaled both the beginning of a new antiwar agenda propagated by the Comintern – in order to 'protect' the Soviet Union – and the end of the international conferences by the LAI. Although the latter found itself in an 'organizational deadlock' it was charged with channeling the antiwar agenda to colonies through the establishment of local antiwar committees.

As I have demonstrated in this chapter, the WCIW was badly equipped to support this task. A reason for this is the fact that the League did not manage to connect to the global South to the extent that it had done before in earlier congresses. Compared to 'Brussels' and 'Frankfurt', 'Amsterdam' did attract a much smaller amount of activists from the global South – who almost exclusively seem to have resided in Europe – and did not offer them key positions in its organization. Nevertheless, the WCIW did host activists from the global South and their presence in Amsterdam merits historiographical attention, especially in order to track the way in which these activists blended their anticolonial convictions with the newly propagated antiwar agenda.

On an individual level, the activists from the global South at the WCIW negotiated their own struggles with the antiwar ideal in several ways. Indonesian activists formulated their independence struggle in antiwar terms by referring to a 'liberation war'. On the other hand, activists like De Kom, Wright and Gardener seem to have kept their struggles apart from the antiwar agenda. A third 'approach' consisted in Katayama's predominant focus on

the antiwar struggle but therefore placed no emphasis on anticolonial activism. Patel, lastly, saw independence as the first and foremost condition for abolishing war.

Through the case of Patel, I have also tried to show that the WCIW offered limited maneuvering space for noncommunist activists. The backlash that Patel experienced after his speech proves that anticolonial activists from different ideological backgrounds were not very welcome at the WCIW due to the strong communist imprint on the event. It was this same dominance that discouraged other parts of the Dutch Left to engage with the WCIW or – in the case of Henriette Roland Holst – became disappointed in the congress afterwards. It is thus safe to assume that its proceedings did not resonate with Dutch society beyond communist circles.

## Conclusion

### Histories of anticolonial agenda-setting

This thesis has looked into a part of the anticolonial activism that took place in the interwar Netherlands from 1927 to 1935. I have focused on three groups of activists: those from the Netherlands, from the Dutch colonies and from other parts of the global South, with an emphasis on the second group and on the Dutch branch of the League against Imperialism (LAI-NL). The research question that guided this thesis has been: *in which ways did anticolonial activists in the Dutch metropole organize themselves to advance an anticolonial agenda?* In this thesis, I have not aimed to exhaustively answer this question but I have broken it down into three cases and asked separate sets of questions about them.

The first case of this thesis has focused on the journals published by the LAI-NL from 1927 to 1928 (*Recht en Vrijheid*, ReV) and in 1932 (*De Anti-Imperialist* and ‘*Liga*’). I have demonstrated that the journal ReV formulated an anticolonial vision that was predominantly centered on the Dutch East Indies but also included other anticolonial struggles. Connectedly, its total amount of authors from the global South outnumbered those from the Netherlands. At the same time, ReV remained a largely ‘intra-imperial’ enterprise as the authors that contributed the most to the journal were either Dutch or Indonesian and most of the articles touched upon the Dutch East Indies. I have argued that ReV also presented itself as ‘heterodox platform’ on which different (leftist) visions on anticolonial activism could be voiced. I have subsequently tried to show that this function was eventually abandoned when the Dutch league operated in completely communist waters. The later journals *De Anti-Imperialist* and ‘*Liga*’ did not include a mission statement of their own and most of their articles were devoted to the LAI(-NL) or international communist agendas.

The second case of this thesis centered on the relation between the Surinamese activist Anton de Kom and the three anticolonial initiatives PI, AKTA and LAI-NL. I have demonstrated that the PI – apart from sometimes offering him a stage for his politics and once honoring him at an anniversary congress – was the catalyst for his politicization as an activist. I have also tried to show that the AKTA was an anticolonial campaign that actively focused on Suriname, most probably because of the active engagements of De Kom. Thirdly, I have argued that the relation between the LAI-NL and De Kom was ambiguous. On the one hand, the organization offered him a space of ‘social mobility’ as within the Dutch section he could climb the anticolonial ladder from sympathizer to one of its main board

members. On the other hand, De Kom's changing position within the LAI-NL between 1930 and 1934 was not accompanied with a lasting influence on its political agenda.

The third case of this thesis touched on *World Congress against Imperialist War* (WCIW). I have demonstrated that the WCIW – although hosting the last international congress of the LAI – did not offer the same conditions for anticolonial activism as previous congresses of the League had done. Compared to 'Brussels' and 'Frankfurt', 'Amsterdam' saw a relatively small number of representatives from the global South while their role in the political bodies of the congress was limited. I have also pointed out that the activists from the global South who did attend, pushed for their own causes while relating to the antiwar agenda in various ways. As Indonesian activists formulated their struggle as a 'liberation war', Anton de Kom, Ada Wright and Gardener kept their agendas strictly apart from that of the WCIW. Sen Katayama echoed the official line of the event and enveloped the anticolonial with the antiwar agenda. Vallabhbhai Patel, on the other hand, placed his anticolonial ideas in front of the antiwar cause by arguing that abolishing empire was the very condition for eradication war. I have additionally argued that the backlash which Patel faced after his appearance, was not necessarily aimed at the contents of his speech – because Patel for the most part agreed with the line of the WCIW – but more on his ideological position as 'bourgeois' nationalist.

How can we connect the seemingly disparate phenomena – journals, relations between activists and a congress – discussed above? Ultimately, I argue, they form different parts of a political history of anticolonial agenda-setting. The case of the LAI-NL journals, first, shows how – from a group of different leftist anticolonial agendas – the communist would eventually become the dominant one. The case of the De Kom, second, demonstrates how one actor tries to – sometimes successfully – make one specific anticolonial agenda (Suriname) part of a larger one (i.e. those of the AKTA and the LAI-NL). The case of the WCIW, thirdly, points to the different ways in which a specific agenda from the Comintern was not simply copied by individual activists but blended with or kept separate from their own agendas. Ultimately, these cases above show that individual activists wanting to push for their agendas always had to relate to those of others, in different constellations of power and in political contexts that were constantly changing.

This thesis has also demonstrated that race figured in at least two ways on the agenda of the activists discussed. In *Recht en Vrijheid*, first, race would be employed to stress some kind of reciprocity between the Indonesian and Dutch working class. The fact that race was not part of the critiques of the journal was arguably due to the socialist and communist frame of reference of ReVs contributors, who predominantly viewed the world through a 'class

lens'. The fact that such a frame did not make the mentioning of race impossible is proven by the few instances that race appeared in this thesis. Almost all of these cases related to Anton de Kom, with a notable exception of Ada Wright at the WCIW, who influenced an article written on the Scottsboro Boys and spoke in the same terms about Suriname and the United States on several occasions (see pages 49-50, 55 and 83-84). In these instances, De Kom prioritized neither race or class but included both in his political vision.

The issue of gender was not prioritized on the anticolonial agenda of the activists discussed in this thesis. In the case of the LAI-NL journals, relations between the sexes were barely touched upon. Despite the female author Henriette Roland Holst being the largest contributor to ReV, only two out of all articles were written by women, being Holst and Yamakawa. In the later journals of the Dutch section, the issue does not surface once. Also in the interactions between Anton de Kom and the three anticolonial initiatives, discussions on the sexes were plainly absent. The WCIW was a largely male environment too, with only 58 out of 2,200 delegates being a woman. In addition, the only woman of colour to speak at the WICW was Ada Wright. While being referred to and praised as the 'mother of the Scottsboro Boys', it is unknown whether she included the idea of gender in her own struggle. Ultimately, all three cases in this thesis have been predominantly homosocial *milieus* that seem to have accepted rather than questioned hierarchies between men and women.

Looking at the three cases mentioned above, a small estimation can be made of the scale and size of the anticolonial activism discussed in this thesis. One can distinguish between three groups. The first and largest consisted of those that stood sympathetic towards to but were not directly engaged in anticolonial activism. Consider, for example, the LAI-NL meeting in 1933 after the 'double momentum' of the incarceration of De Kom and the mutiny in the Dutch East Indies, where around a thousand people were reported to be present (see page 67). A second and smaller group consisted of the people that were linked to but were not involved in anticolonial activism on a daily basis, for example the members of the local departments of the LAI-NL and the subscribers to its journals. As I have indicated in chapter III, this group was not larger than a several hundred people (see pages 45-47 and 55). The third and smallest group was directly involved with anticolonial activism on an almost daily basis. Consider, for example, the people behind the AKTA campaign or the members of the LAI-NL that frequently attended its meetings. This group did probably not consist of more than a dozen or sometimes even a few people (see, for example, page 63).

This assessment demonstrates that anticolonial activism – even within the communist circles of the Netherlands – was a relatively minor phenomenon. This relates to the problems that anticolonial initiatives in the metropole faced. The direct causes behind the demise of initiatives like ReV and the LAI-NL were financial. Financial shortages, in turn, were caused by a wider public disinterest for the anticolonial cause. Without the necessary people paying for membership fees or subscriptions, these initiatives could simply not exist. In the colonies, the impact of anticolonial activism from the metropole was nearly absent. As demonstrated above, a substantial amount of activism went into publications but due to shipping costs, colonial censorship and – in the case of the Dutch East Indies – language barriers, such documents did almost never reach their target. In Suriname the language barrier did not exist and a couple of publications arrived in the colony and were published in the Surinamese newspaper *Banier van Waarheid en Recht*. It is unknown, however, to what extent such publications would resonate with people living in the colony.

To conclude, activists in the Dutch metropole organized themselves to advance an anticolonial agenda through journals like *Recht en Vrijheid*, *De Anti-Imperialist* and “*Liga*”, specific initiatives like the PI, SPTI, LAI-NL and the AKTA campaign and through their participation at congresses like the WCIW. I am very much aware that this is only a partial answer to my main question. More research needs to be undertaken to complement it. One could, for example, study the journals that preceded or succeeded *Recht en Vrijheid*. One case in point is the journal *De Vlam* (1945-1952) which was edited by Henriette Roland Holst and that advocated for Indonesian independence after WWII. Other accounts could focus on the (few) female anticolonial activists that operated in the interwar Netherlands. Take, for example, the tour that the former *Boven-Digoel* inmate and communist Raden Soekoesih made through the Netherlands in 1937.<sup>345</sup> In addition, female PI members like Artinah Samsuudin and Siti Soendari travelled beyond Dutch borders in support of the communist anti-war movement.<sup>346</sup> Thirdly, although I have not been able to find any source material on the matter, it would make for an interesting case to compare the idea of race employed by different kinds of activist. Was Anton de Kom unique in this regard, as this thesis seems to suggest? Lastly, it would be insightful to study the WCIW as an event within the larger political trajectories of the activists that were present. Did Patel, for example, change his position vis-à-vis communism after his clash in Amsterdam? These and other questions

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<sup>345</sup> Poeze, *In het land van*, 275-276; Morriën, *Indonesie los van Holland*, 254. See also the contemporary publications Philippon-Raden Soekoesih and G.J. van Munster, *Indonesië, een politiestaat* (Amsterdam: De Schijfwerper, 1937) and articles like ‘Uit het Digoelkamp naar Nederland’, *Het Volksdagblad*, October 14, 1937, 1, 4.

<sup>346</sup> Stutje, *Behind the banner*, 34-35, 230.

could further contribute to our understanding of the activism discussed in this thesis. Ultimately, they can add more colour to the canvas on which I have been allowed to paint.

The congress has ended. Everyone packs their things. Large doors swing open. Fresh air fills the hallway. The first people step outside into the evening breeze, then more and more delegates walk towards the exit. There go the attendants, with slow steps and bodies tired of debating. The observant Amsterdammer could have seen them, among the large crowd. Wright, Katayama, Soebardjo. Where would they go to now? Patel, De Kom, Rachiem. What will they see last? Joy? Deception? A prison cell? Independence, perhaps? Everyone goes their way, off to home, off to work. Pressing questions prick their minds. But they believe they have done the right thing: resisting empire, in the Dutch metropole.

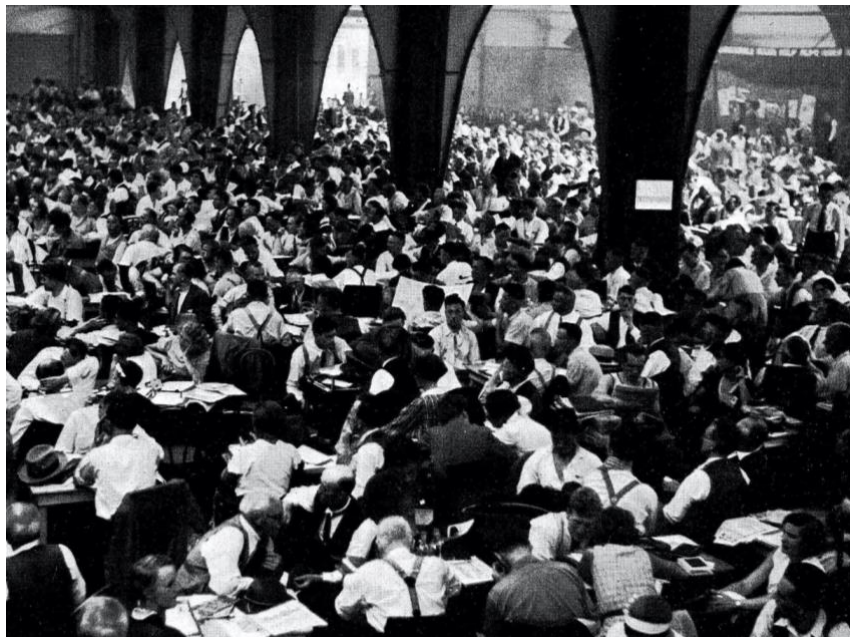


Image 22. *Protesting war in the Dutch capital*

The 1932 World Congress against Imperialist War in Amsterdam.



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*De Sumatra Post*  
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